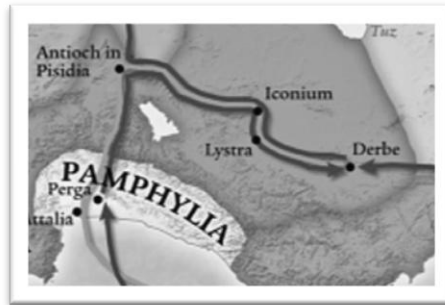


First Gentile Missions: Iconium – Acts 14:1-7

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/29/12)

Introduction

1. Acts 14 describes three cities in which Paul and his companions ministered before returning from the first missionary trip. Each city (Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) had progressively less Hebrew influence.
2. Expelled from Antioch, Paul and company fled to Iconium, some fifty miles to the east of Antioch (in what is now Turkey), a governmental center of the Roman province of Galatia, predominately Gentile.



3. A second-century non-canonical book from Iconium, *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, contains the only physical description of Paul ever recorded: short, bald, bowlegged, heavy eyebrows, and protruding eyes.
4. No message of the apostles is recorded in Iconium, but the substance of the message is stated—“the word of His grace.” Paul’s message in Lystra is recorded. It will be interesting to compare it with the message at Antioch: Antioch’s was to Jews; Lystra’s, to Gentiles.
5. Luke’s focus in this section is to demonstrate the continuity of the work of church planting in diverse situations and in hostile settings. We find that continuity expressed in three things: (1) method of ministry; (2) support of ministry; and (3) danger in ministry.

I. Method of the Ministry

A. “Speaking”— (v. 3)

1. The *manner* of speaking was bold and free (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 12-16; Acts 9:27, 28; 13:46; 19:8; 26:26; Eph. 6:20; 1 Thess. 2:2)
2. God’s plan involves communicating the message of salvation (Isaiah 52:7; Rom. 10:8, 14, 15, 17; 1 Cor. 1:21)

B. The subject communicated—“the Word [*logos*] of His grace” (v. 3)

1. The *occasion*: their remaining due to a great number of converts (v. 1), and opposition from the Jews (v. 2)—both products of preaching
2. The *purpose*: discipling the converts
3. The *effort*: an extended endeavor —“a long time”

C. The *authority* of communicating—“for the Lord” and “bearing witness to”

1. The preposition translated “for” is *epi* (“in reliance upon” or “on the basis of”). Both fit: *dependence on* and *obedience to* the Lord
2. The apostles, as witnesses, communicated God’s Word in God’s power with God’s call and in God’s will—the confidence of holy ambition.

II. Support of the Ministry

A. The supernatural support of their ministry is seen in its *results* (v. 1).

1. They spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed. The goal of ministry is *converts*—believers who love and serve the Lord.
2. The apostles did not effect the result; God did. The lesson? Improving on the method will not ensure a greater result.
3. The message *received*, however, must be the message *delivered*. It must not be altered.

B. The supernatural support of their ministry is seen in its *confirmation* (v. 3)

1. The Holy Spirit “granted” signs and wonders in connection to the “witness” of the apostles “done by their hands.” What kind of signs is not said.
2. It appears that this confirmation came after the opposition developed (v. 2).
3. At the sole discretion of the Spirit, no miracles were recorded in Antioch.

III. Danger of the Ministry

A. Gospel ministry is *divisive* (v. 4).

1. Jesus did not come to smooth things over but to upset the status quo (Matt. 10:16-40).
2. The nature of man and the nature of the gospel are mutually exclusive: human religion focuses on human goodness; the gospel, on human sinfulness.
3. Thus, the gospel is a savor of both life and death (2 Cor. 2:16).

B. Gospel ministry is *dangerous* (vv. 5-7).

1. Those that oppose the gospel will seek to injure the messengers (v. 5).
2. Fleeing harm is not cowardice. Jesus taught His followers to flee (Matt. 10:23). The apostles followed His instruction to escape danger, but notice that they continued to preach (v. 7).
3. Luke describes an escalation of persecution from Antioch to Lystra.

Lessons

1. If communicating the “Word of His grace” is God’s method to disciple believers, can we ever hear too much?
2. How are we evidencing supernatural support for our ministry here?
3. Are you prepared for persecution? It is coming to believers in America very soon.