

Iconium, Derbe, Lystra then Home

Read: Acts 14:1-20

Further Reading: Acts 7:17

**Key Verse:
“For Christ’s sake I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

2 Corinthians 12:10

Extra: Do you have any thoughts about how easily people change their minds?

Level 5 lesson 21

Expelled from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas continued on towards the town of Iconium. Remember, in those days travel was very different from today. There were no buses or trains; no fast cars speeding along fine tar-sealed roads with stereo sound and air-conditioning! Paul and Barnabas simply walked - over mountains, across rivers, and on difficult tracks through wild country infested by robbers, carrying what few possessions were necessary for their trip. Paul speaks of these hardships in our Key Verse, but in spite of all this, and the persecution they had experienced in Antioch, they were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). What a blessing to be active messengers of the Gospel in the service of our Lord!

TAKING SIDES

Arriving in Iconium, they began speaking in the synagogue as usual, and “a great number of both Jews and Gentiles believed” (v1). However, there were many Jews who refused to believe and stirred up opposition to the Apostles amongst the Gentiles. Undeterred, the two men of God continued boldly preaching the Gospel, and God confirmed their words by working “miraculous signs and wonders” (v3). As a result, the whole city was divided, with some siding with the Jews and some with the Apostles.

Friends, today the same important question faces all of us: “Whose side are you on?” The Lord’s side or the devil’s? We pray that all of you will choose Jesus Christ as Saviour and join God’s family!

Once more, opposition became so violent that the Apostles had to flee. Leaving Iconium they headed for the nearby towns of Lystra and Derbe, where they continued to preach the ‘Good News’ about Jesus.

A REMARKABLE MIRACLE

At Lystra, a cripple sat listening intently as Paul preached. Paul seeing he had faith to be healed, told him in a loud voice, “Stand up on your feet!” Immediately, the man, who had been lame from birth, jumped up and began to walk! This miracle had a huge effect on the people of Lystra.

“The gods have come down to us in human form!” they shouted excitedly, naming Paul ‘Zeus’ and Barnabas ‘Hermes’ after their gods. They even proceeded to prepare bulls and wreaths of flowers to offer as sacrifices to the two Apostles ‘gods!’

How easy it would have been for Paul and Barnabas to take advantage of the people’s pagan superstition. Instead they were horrified. They rushed in amongst the crowd and ordered them to stop such foolishness, crying out, “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men - human like you!” They then told them of the True and Living God, the mighty Creator and sustainer of the universe; the One Who is the Great Provider of all our needs. Even so, they had difficulty in stopping the crowd offering sacrifices to them.

However, soon after this incident, verse 19 shows a very different picture. Persuaded against the Apostles by wicked Jews from Antioch, these same people who wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas, now wanted to stone them to death!

HOMEWARD BOUND

They actually did stone Paul and dragged his body outside the city gate thinking he was dead. (Some Bible students think Paul really did die and that what happened next was a case of resurrection). In any case, it is clear that a miracle of some sort happened. When the Christians gathered around him later, he got up and went back into the city and he and Barnabas left for Derbe the next day and preached there, as though nothing had happened to them!

By this time, the Apostles had probably been away over two years. They had seen much blessing on this first missionary journey, suffered many hardships, and now they realised that their task, for the moment, was finished. On their journey home, they passed through a number of the places they had already visited, teaching the new disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith. They also appointed elders to look after the various churches. Finally they arrived back at Antioch in Syria and gathered the Church together to report on all that God had done amongst the Gentiles.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What is meant by the question “Which side are you on?”	.....
2. What miracle took place at Lystra and how did the people react?	.....
3. Paul and Barnabas were horrified. What did they teach about worship?	.....
4. Why was Paul able to travel and preach so soon after being stoned?	.....
5. When the Apostles got home, what did they do?	.....

My Name is Age

The Gospel reaches Europe

Key Verse:
**“Not only so,
 but we also
 rejoice in our
 sufferings,
 because we
 know that
 suffering
 produces
 perseverance.”**

Romans 5:3

Extra: What other issues can be like circumcision for us today?

Level 5 Lesson 22

Read Acts 15:1-29; 16:1-23
Further Reading: Genesis 21:1-7

COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM: Following their return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas continued teaching and strengthening the believers. During this period, a group of men arrived from Judea; “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses,” they claimed, “you cannot be saved!” Now this is a very important point; if this were true, it would mean that Christ’s death and resurrection alone, were not sufficient to save a sinner. Our salvation would actually depend on us; on something we did.

Naturally, Paul and Barnabas disagreed strongly with them! Finally, they and some other believers, were sent to Jerusalem to resolve the issue at a Council of the Apostles and elders.

There the Apostle Peter reminded them all how God had clearly led him to share the Gospel with the Gentiles and had “accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.” Paul and Barnabas also shared how God had been pleased to perform miraculous signs and wonders among the Gentiles, through them. It was finally agreed, that if God Himself had accepted them then there was NOTHING extra TO DO in order for a person to be saved. Only faith in Jesus Christ is necessary. There were however, some things that Christians should NOT DO. These four things, all associated with pagan temple worship, were set out in a letter which was taken back to the believers in Antioch.

A VISION: Some time later, Paul along with Silas and Luke, re-visited many of the places he and Barnabas had gone to on their first missionary journey. At Lystra, a young believer named Timothy joined them and the group continued on, teaching and encouraging believers in every town. Twice in chapter 16 we read that God’s Spirit directed them clearly (vv6-7), and at Troas, Paul again received clear instructions through a vision from God, in which a Macedonian man begged, “Come over and help us!”

TRUE BELIEVER: Immediately, they sailed for Macedonia, eventually arriving at the Roman colony of Philippi, the chief city. As there was no synagogue there, a group of Jewish women met for prayer by the river outside the city.

The next Sabbath Day, the four men joined them. One of them, a self-employed businesswoman named Lydia, listened intently as Paul shared the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Then the Lord “opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message,” and she and her household (who had apparently also believed), were baptised as a testimony to their new faith and in obedience to the Apostle’s teaching. She then kindly offered the group accommodation at her house, which they gratefully accepted.

A SLAVE GIRL: One day, a poor girl possessed by an evil spirit, followed Paul and his friends crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved!” (v17) Day after day she kept this up until Paul could bear her tormented presence no longer. In the name of Jesus Christ he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her, and the girl was set free.

You may wonder why Paul was not pleased by the girl’s words, after all, they were true! Well, we don’t know in what mocking tone her message was delivered and in any case, Paul didn’t want any assistance from Satan; he knew that the evil one’s motive is always only to corrupt and destroy the work of God. In Mark 1:24-25, 34, when the demons wanted to speak to Jesus, He too silenced them.

A FALSE CHARGE: Now this girl was a slave and owned by men who made money out of her demonic fortune-telling powers. So when they discovered she could no longer do this, they were angry. Seizing Paul and Silas, they dragged them into the market place before the magistrates. There they were charged with ‘Being Jews’, and causing the “uproar in the city” by “teaching customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” Of course, none of these charges were true, but to their shame, the magistrates did not reject the wild charges brought against Paul and Silas.

Jewish nationality, of course, is no crime. Instead, it was the accusers who were troubling the city! And there was certainly nothing in the Gospel to conflict with existing Roman law. However, with the angry crowd joining the attack against the servants of Christ, the authorities ordered the two Apostles to be flogged and thrown in prison - without even giving them opportunity to defend themselves. Now this DID break Roman law, as they would soon find out!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was the issue of circumcision so important?	.....
2. What was finally agreed by the Jerusalem Council?	.....
3. In what way did God prepare Lydia for Paul’s message?	.....
4. Why were the slave owners enraged with Paul?	.....
5. What wrong action did the magistrates take?	.....

A Night in Jail

Read Acts 16:22-34

Further Reading: John 3:36; 5:24; and 6:40,47

Key Verse:

“Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Ephesians 6:11

Extra: How would you describe Paul and Silas?

Level 5 Lesson 23

APOSTLES FLOGGED: Following their appearance before the town’s magistrates and summary sentencing (without any defence being allowed) Paul and Silas were marched away and cruelly flogged with a Roman scourge. This terrible weapon of punishment was a whip of many cords, and each cord had pieces of metal and bone attached. When a prisoner was lashed, the strokes cut his back to ‘ribbons.’ More than 40 lashes were forbidden by law and the Jews always gave only 39 for fear of miscounting! Paul wrote later that he had been flogged with 39 lashes on 5 occasions (2 Corinthians 11:24) and this was probably one of the times.

Following this, the bleeding prisoners were then dragged unceremoniously to a dark, damp dungeon deep in the prison. There they were thrown to the stone floor and their feet clamped harshly in the wooden stocks. Movement and sleep was impossible! The day had certainly not ‘panned out’ as Paul and Silas had perhaps anticipated! However, this was only the beginning of what God had planned for that never-to-be-forgotten night in the Philippi prison!

THE SINGING APOSTLES: Despite their humiliation and painful wounds, there was no despair or self-pity in Paul and Silas’ hearts; no bitterness or vengeful thoughts towards the perpetrators of this gross injustice against them. They considered it a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for their Lord, and their hearts were filled with an all-conquering joy known only to those who are willing to sacrifice all for Christ. Yes, they were truly “cast down, but not defeated!” At midnight, there rose from the darkness of that Philippian dungeon amazing hymns of praise and worship to God as Paul and Silas’ made their prison cell a “house of praise.”

THE LISTENING PRISONERS: The other prisoners must have been amazed to hear singing coming from the inner dungeon. They had often heard oaths and curses from there, but this was simply unbelievable. Here were men, imprisoned wrongfully and cruelly beaten - yet still joyful! What a testimony to them of the reality of Paul and Silas’ faith in God!

Meanwhile, the jailer who had shown Paul and Silas no sympathy, and displayed even less interest in their preaching, was fast asleep with his family in his house nearby.

A MIGHTY EARTHQUAKE: However, shortly after midnight he was roughly shaken awake by a mighty earthquake! However, this was no ordinary earthquake. Yes friends, God was working in this earthquake! Prison doors flew open, prisoners chains were unlocked and fell off, and in a very short space of time all the prisoners were standing free and unharmed!

Within minutes, the jailer arrived with his flickering torch, and seeing all the doors open assumed the prisoners had escaped. Knowing he was responsible for their safe custody, he took out his sword intending to kill himself. Seeing this, Paul yelled out, “Don’t hurt yourself; we are all here!”

A MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION: Seized by the fear of God, the repentant jailer fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” he asked. Ah! The moment of truth! A lost sinner, confronted with the Living, Holy God, realised his desperate position and cried out for salvation. What a blessed moment! Bearing the poor man no malice for his harsh treatment of them earlier, Paul and Silas replied “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” Could anything be clearer than that? This is the way of salvation for every lost sinner, including you and me!

Paul and Silas then explained to the jailer and his family, more fully what it meant to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again for them. The jailer and his family believed and displayed their faith immediately by humbly washing the Apostles wounds and preparing them food. Then the whole family were baptised, to show outwardly the amazing transformation which had taken place inwardly. Truly, “Old things are passed away; all things have become new!” Forgiven, cleansed from sin, and in-dwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, they rejoiced together with the Apostles. Here was the true reason for the imprisonment of the Apostles: God wanted to reach the jailer, his family, and the prisoners with the Gospel!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did the Apostles do in prison?	.....
2. How was God seen at work in the earthquake?	.....
3. What did the jailer come to realise about himself?	.....
4. What important question did the jailer ask the Apostles?	.....
5. How can sinners be saved today?	.....

The Gospel Believed & Opposed

Key Verse:
“Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.”

Acts 28:24

Extra: How can you plan to search the Scriptures daily?

Level 5 Lesson 24

Read Acts 16:35-40

Further Reading: Acts 17:1-14

After the amazing events at Philippi and the conversion of the Roman jailer, Paul and Silas were advised to leave town and say nothing about their illegal beatings and imprisonment. Instead, as Roman citizens, Paul insisted the local magistrates come to publicly apologise to them and tell them they were free to leave. Paul did this, not for any personal grudge, but to teach them a powerful lesson about the law's authority, which ultimately comes from God (Romans 13:1). These magistrates had flagrantly misused it for their own purposes, and it would be a valuable lesson to be reminded that no-one is above the law - especially not those who claim to uphold it!

PROVING CHRIST IS MESSIAH: After Paul and Silas left Philippi they travelled to the sea-port of Thessalonica, in Greece. For three consecutive Sabbath days, Paul preached the gospel in the Jewish synagogue, showing from the Scriptures that the Christ they were expecting must suffer crucifixion and rise from the dead. This was strange news to them, because they thought their Scriptures taught that Christ, the Messiah, must reign and rule over them and the nations. Paul did not deny this but pointed out those portions of Scripture which clearly refer to Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, which had to happen before He reigns in power and majesty.

Paul probably referred to Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, where many aspects of Christ's suffering and death are vividly foretold and His resurrection clearly implied. For instance, "Though the Lord makes His life a guilt offering, He shall see His offspring and prolong His days" (Isaiah 53:10) and "I (Messiah) will declare your (God's) name to my brothers" (Psalm 22:22). Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 16:10, which say, "You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay," all clearly demand the resurrection of the Messiah for their fulfilment.

Having shown this much from the Scriptures, Paul then declared: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ!" You may ask, "How could Paul be so sure?" Well, the answer is clear: if Jesus suffered, died, and rose from the dead, then He must have fulfilled the Scriptures which prophesied this of Messiah.

Of course, the facts of Christ's suffering, crucifixion, and burial were not in question; they were attested by thousands of eyewitnesses.

However, Paul and the other Apostles were also able to joyfully attest to the fact of His resurrection, for they were eye-witnesses of it! Therefore, Jesus would also fulfil the other Scriptures that speak of Messiah reigning. So Paul's compelling argument was complete; Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of God. This fact always demands a reaction. How would Paul's listeners respond?

FACING OPPOSITION: Preaching the Good News about Jesus Christ always has a two-fold effect: some believe and some don't. Verses 4 and 5 reveal that there were those who believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, but sadly, there were those who rejected Him and opposed the preaching of the gospel. Among the believers were some devout Greeks and prominent women of the town.

The unbelieving group consisted largely of Jews who were envious of the following the Apostles were gaining. Unable to show any fault in Paul's argument, they resorted to violence to stop him preaching. Gathering some of the city's criminals together, they started a riot, and attacked the house of the Apostles' host Jason. Not finding the Apostles there, they arrested Jason and some other believers and took them to the city's rulers. They charged them with sheltering men who were 'disturbing the peace' and even raised a charge of treason against them!

BELIEVING THE MESSAGE: Seeing the turmoil of the crowd, the officials wisely arranged bail for Jason, and let him and the others go. Later that night, on the advice of the Christians, Paul and Silas left Thessalonica and travelled to Berea, a town about 60km away. As usual, Paul went to the synagogue and preached the same message as before: namely, that before coming in His glorious kingdom, the Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead.

Wow! What a different attitude the Bereans displayed! They listened attentively to Paul's message, and then examined the Scriptures themselves to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, "Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men" (v12). Friend, you can do the same; search the Scriptures and place your faith in Jesus Christ too!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Paul insist the magistrates apologise?	.....
2. Why did Paul preach about Jesus from the Scriptures?	.....
3. Why was this message difficult for Jews to accept?	.....
4. Why was Paul so sure of his message?
5. How did the Bereans display a different attitude to the message?

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