

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 13-14

The Apostle Paul is Christianity's most prolific missionary. Through the years, folks have marveled at *his brain*, his vast intellect - *his heart*, his deep passion for people - *his shoulders*, his responsibility for the churches - *his back*, the beatings he endured for the Gospel's sake... **But never underestimate Paul's feet!**

Paul crisscrossed the empire four times. In the part of Acts that covers his travels, forty different cities are mentioned. His three missionary campaigns logged more than 8100 miles and kept him on the road over a decade. **Imagine the stamps on Paul's passport!**

Oswald Sanders once wrote, "Other missionaries have opened continents to the Gospel. Paul opened a world." Today, we embark on Paul's first missionary journey, which took him nearly three years to complete.

Acts 13, "Now in the church that was at Antioch..." Notice the shift. Until Chapter 13, the headquarters of the Jesus movement has been Jerusalem, but now its epicenter moves north to Syria - the church at Antioch.

And *Paul* replaces *Peter* in the spotlight. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, but Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. Antioch was the gateway to the west and will be the hub of the Gospel's spread among the Gentiles.

Verse 1, Now “at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers:” First, “Barnabas...” who had been sent from Jerusalem to encourage the believers in Antioch.

Then “Simeon who was called Niger.” The nickname “Niger” means “black.” Simeon could’ve been a black skinned man from Africa, or what is today, Nigeria.

“Lucius of Cyrene...” Remember Simon, the man who carried the cross for Jesus? He was from Cyrene in North Africa. *Perhaps Simon witnessed to Lucius?*

Notice the role played by dark-skinned Africans in the early church... The Ethiopian in Acts 8 who Philip baptized was a black man. Here, two black men launch Paul’s ministry. Many of the most famous early church fathers were of African descent. Augustine was black. His mother Monica was a Berber with dark-skin.

Athanasius, who helped defeat the Arian heresy, was known as “the black dwarf” because of his dark skin and small stature... The early apologist, Tertullian, was from North Africa and probably a black-skinned man.

It’s erroneously taught that Africans were first exposed to Christianity on American slave plantations. *Not so!* Blacks were among the church fathers who laid the foundation of Christianity. *The Gospel came to a black Africa years before it arrived in a white Europe!*

There were two other leaders in Antioch... “Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch...”

This Herod was Antipas, the man who beheaded John the Baptist. He married his brother’s wife, Herodias and lived in

open, defiant immorality. Jesus called him, “a fox.” Herod and Manaen started out either close pals or relatives before their paths split. Manaen’s conscience was saved. Antipas’ was seared.

And last among the attendees of this prayer meeting in Antioch was “Saul” - who later is renamed Paul.

Verse 2, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

The rest of Acts tracks Paul's exploits. He'll shake the world for Jesus, but notice his calling starts at a prayer meeting. These brothers had gathered, “to minister to the Lord.” We think of Paul *ministering for the Lord*, but first he “*ministered to the Lord.*”

And this should be our priority. Did you know that you and I, *finite human beings*, can minister to the *infinite God*. We can make God happy. We can bring pleasure to an all-sufficient God with our praise.

God saves us not just to *serve Him*, but He wants a relationship with us. He desires we *know His heart* and *express ours*. Here, the church gathers not to *seek anything from God or do anything for God*, but to linger in the presence of the lover of our soul.

Yet, it was on such an occasion that the Holy Spirit spoke to the church, “*separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.*” Now, the questions arises, “*How did the Spirit speak?*” Was it an audible voice, or handwriting on the wall, or an inner witness? We don’t know! But there’s a

clue. In verse 1 we learn some of the men praying were *“prophets.”*

Thus, the instructions may’ve come by a word of prophecy - *a direct message prompted by God’s Spirit.*

“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” As we read of Paul’s vast accomplishments, remember he was supported by a praying church. Some folks I know were called by God and just **went**, but Paul was **sent** by a local church.

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia (this was the port nearest Antioch), and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea - south of Turkey.

“And when they arrived in Salamis (the port on the eastern end of Cyprus), they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” This will be Paul’s pattern. *He modeled it after Jesus.* In every city, he’ll preach the Gospel first to Jews; then to the Gentiles.

“They also had John as their assistant.” Acts 12:25 also calls him *“Mark.”* Colossians 4:10 tells us *“John Mark”* was Barnabas’ nephew. Tradition says he was a disciple of Peter and authored the Gospel of Mark.

So verse 6, *“Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos...”* Paphos was the capital city of Cyprus - on the west end of the island - 90 miles opposite Salamis. Paul and his pals had preached their way across the island. At Paphos, *“they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus...”* or translated, *“son of Jesus.”*

Remember, “*Jesus*” wasn’t yet a Christian name. In the first century, it was still a very popular name among the Hebrews.

This “*Bar-Jesus was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man.*” Of course, you wonder if he was so intelligent, what’s he doing buddying up to a false prophet. Sergius Paulus was the “*proconsul*” or Roman authority on the island. And he was bright enough “*to call for Barnabas and Paul... to hear the word of God.*” Smart folks seek out “*the word of God.*”

“*But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*” “*Elymas*” is an Arabic word for “*sorcerer.*” Apparently, this was another name for “*Bar-Jesus,*” Sergius Paulus’ spiritual advisor.

And of course, the idea of a politicians consulting a psychic is nothing new. **Nancy Reagan and Hilary Clinton regularly invited soothsayers into the White House.** It’s sad when politicians grope for help by turning to the occult rather than to God for wisdom.

Here, Bar-Jesus knows if his client hears the true Word of God, he’ll be out of a job. Real Christianity and the occult can never co-exist. *So he opposes Saul...*

Verse 9, “*Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?*”

And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.”

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Remember this is what it took for Paul to see the truth. On the Road to Damascus, God blinded him with a bright light. Now Saul does the same to the sorcerer. He turns out the *lights* so the man can see *spiritually*.

As a side note, it's in verse 9 that Saul's name changes to Paul. **"Saul"** meant **"requested one."** Saul was a man in demand. **"Paul"** means **"little."** And this marked a change in Saul. He went from being *haughty* to *humble* - he was content to live in Jesus' shadow.

Verse 13, **"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia..."** They docked on what is today, the southern coast of Turkey.

"And John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." *Why did John Mark leave?* We're not sure. It could've been the fear of persecution... or the rigors of travel... Perhaps as a Jew, John Mark had doubts about preaching to Gentiles... The early church father, Chrysostom, said, **"the lad wanted his mother."**

But a more likely answer may be tied to the phrase, **"Paul and his party."** Until now it's been **"Barnabas and Saul,"** but it seems over the months they wintered in Cyprus, Paul asserted leadership. It's now **"Paul and his party."** Paul and Barnabas eventually split company.

This may've been the first crack in the break-up. Perhaps Mark saw Paul taking charge and became jealous for his uncle. If so, it won't be the last time a person's *envy* gets in the way of *ministry*.

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.” There were actually seven Antiochs in the ancient world. Paul's mission originated in *Antioch of Syria*, now they're in *Antioch of Galatia*.

Notice what's happened... They landed in Perga, a seaside city. But there's no record of any ministry there. Instead they immediately journey 100 miles and climb 3600 feet to the mountain village of Antioch.

Why not preach in Perga before the arduous climb?

Paul later writes to these same people of Antioch, in Galatians 4:13, "You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the Gospel to you at the first." Some physical ailment drove Paul out of the tropical climate of Perga to seek the higher ground of Galatia.

At the time, coastal Turkey was known for a deadly strain of malaria. People who contracted it said it was like a red-hot bar thrust through their forehead. Some early traditions say that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" were the migraine headaches caused by his malaria.

In his letter, Paul notes the Galatians' love for him. He says "you would've plucked out your eyes and given them to me." Some think Paul suffered a sort of eye disease. Perhaps this condition was tied to the headaches and malaria, and was

triggered by the hot, humid climate on the Turkish coast. Whatever it was *something* caused Paul to head straight for Antioch.

In Antioch, “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Telling a preacher to “say on...” is like saying sic’em to a bulldog. “Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. After that He gave *them* judges for about 450 years, until Samuel the prophet.”

He’s giving a quick overview of Jewish history.

And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘*I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.*’ When Paul speaks to Jews, he begins with God’s dealings in Jewish history. But when he speaks to Gentiles, he starts with creation and nature.

Paul's sermon here sounds like Stephen's in the Temple in Acts 7. That's what got him stoned. I'll bet he died thinking his words had fallen on deaf ears.

But God's promises in Isaiah 55:11, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

God's Word never fails! Apparently, there was one man in the crowd who carefully listened to Stephen. Though Saul rejected it at the time, he took notes, and here he patterns his sermon after what Stephen taught.

When Paul gets to King David, he calls him "*a man after (God's) own heart.*" Then he says in verse 23, "*From this man's seed...*" And this is the purpose of the genealogies in the early chapters of Luke and Matthew. They trace Jesus' lineage all the way back to David.

All Jewish history led up to David's seed!

God promised a descendent from David who would be an eternal king. The Hebrews called this ruler the "*Messiah.*" He would deliver Israel and rule the world.

Paul continues, "*according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus - after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'*" Both the genealogies and John the Baptist pointed to Jesus.

Verse 26, “Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God...” Paul was speaking to Jews, and Gentiles like Cornelius, who rejected paganism and feared the God of Israel. They worshipped God and adopted Jewish morality.

To them both “the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*.” The OT predicted the Messiah would be rejected by His own.

Psalm 69:8 is a prophetic cry of the Messiah, “I have become a stranger to My brothers, and an alien to My mother's children.” The Jews read the Scripture each week, but rejected the Messiah of which it spoke.

“And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.” Even the crucifixion played out according to God's script. Put Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 beside Matthew 27, and every detail from His *bloody back*, to the *spikes in His hands and feet*, to the *soldiers gambling for His coat* - were foretold in the OT.

Verse 30 records the greatest miracle of all time, “But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.

As it is also written in the second Psalm: *'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'* Jesus was *"begotten"* or given life a second time upon His resurrection!

Verse 34, *"And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'"* Realize, Jesus wasn't the only person raised from the dead. In the OT, Elisha raised the widow's son. On three occasions, Jesus raised the dead. In Acts 9, Peter raised a woman. **But all these people were raised to die again.**

Last Sunday, I was with my dad when he died. He'd been unhappy. He hated the debilitating effect old age was having on him. When he breathed his last, I was with him, and I thought of asking God to raise him from the dead, but if I had my dad would've slugged me.

The last thing he wanted to was to return from glory to go through the ugly ordeal of having to die again.

Everybody God raised from the dead, died twice. Death was *delayed*, not *defeated* - except for Jesus. He was raised never to die again. Jesus' resurrection defeated death once and for all. Jesus was *"begotten"* to unending life. His body never saw corruption.

"Therefore He also says in another Psalm (16:10): 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.” Obviously, the promise of Psalm 16 wasn’t to David, for his body returned to dust. God’s “*Holy One*” is Jesus. He alone rose to never die again.

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Paul tells the Jews that observing their own Law won’t bring salvation. We’re “justified” or treated “*just-as-if-I’d*” never sinned by faith in Jesus.

And His resurrection is proof! The fact Jesus overcame *the corrupting effects of sin* was evidence He had authority to forgive *the penalty of sin*. Salvation is by faith and faith alone in the name of Jesus Christ.

“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: *Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.*” Paul quotes Habakkuk 1:5.

The marvel God did in Habakkuk’s day was to **use pagan Gentiles** to judge His own people, Israel. But the marvel in Paul’s day went a step further; He **saved Gentiles**. And Paul warns the Jews, “**don’t harden your heart and miss out on this marvel.**” God’s requirement to be saved is changing for all men. You get to heaven not *by keeping the Law*, but *by having faith in Jesus*.

“So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” When we read Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we learn they didn’t continue in grace for long. Rather they added elements of Judaism to the requirements of salvation. They forsook the sole sufficiency of Christ and created their own Law - a “**grace plus**” theology.

Paul exhorts the Galatians (5:1) “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Verse 44, “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” The whole city of Antioch had come out to hear Paul. And because of envy, the Jews tried to undermine his ministry. It didn’t matter he was speaking the truth, they were jealous of his popularity.

It’s sad that envy can derail a move of God.

I like this definition, “Envy is the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.”

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of

everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us:”

And he quotes Isaiah 49:6. *‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’* The Jews were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, not an obstacle. “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” It hit the Gentiles; God desires to save all tribes. His salvation is grace for every race!

“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Again, Luke is stressing that Gentiles weren’t saved by accident. It was God’s predetermined will. The Gentiles were also appointed to eternal life.

Verse 49, “And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”

The mob pressured city hall. The Jews used their political connections to expel Paul and Barnabas from Antioch... *God’s men split, but God’s Word spread.*

And “they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” They *get run out of town*, but it doesn’t *get them down*. They shake the dust off their feet! They shake it off and move on! *Hey, you’ll never get shook up if you learn to shake off!*

In the words of Taylor Swift, when haters hate and fakers fake you’ve got to *shake it off, shake it off...*

Chapter 14, “Now it happened in Iconium (90 miles up the road from Antioch) 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.”

This was unprecedented, Jews and Gentiles were being saved. “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” Hey, “The only thing better than going to heaven is taking someone with you. But the only thing worse than going to hell is taking someone with you.”

Here, the Jews are doing the latter. They didn’t want to share God’s favor with Gentiles, so they sabotaged their salvation by stirring up rumors against Paul.

Gossip is a serious sin, especially when directed at God's messengers. Sour a person's attitude toward a pastor or a church with baseless accusations, and you cripple their ability to deliver God's Word. It can cost folks their salvation. Be sure to guard your tongue!

“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.” Miracles occurred in Iconium.

“But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.” And Jesus said the Gospel would have this effect! In Luke 12:51, Jesus said, “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.”

People are ultimately *reconciled in Christ*, but initially they can be *divided by Christ*. You're either *in* or *out* - a saint or *ain't*. The Gospel caused division in Iconium.

“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.” Paul was booted more than a football. He's kicked out of Iconium, and moves to *Lystra*, 18 miles southwest.

“And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.” It wasn't that he *couldn't walk*, he had *never walked*. He suffered from a birth defect.

“*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!”*”

What tipped Paul off to the crippled man's faith we're not sure. Perhaps it was the gift of discernment or word of knowledge, but whatever it was, Paul ordered the man to his feet. “*And he leaped and walked.*” A miracle!

Verse 11, “*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.*”

Apparently, there was no synagogue in Lystra, so Paul goes straight to the Gentiles. The town had very few Jews or even

educated Gentiles, unlike the bigger cities. Lystra was backwoods, a hick town. The citizens of Lystra were superstitious and excitable people.

They worshipped the Greek pantheon of gods, and they walked on pins and needles not to offend one.

That's what's behind their following actions...

The Roman poet Ovid told a tale about a couple near Lystra. The Greek gods Zeus and Hermes came to earth disguised as humans. Everywhere they visited they were shunned, until they came to the hut of these peasants. The couple showed them great hospitality.

Afterward, the travelers took the couple to the top of a mountain where they saw the region wiped out, but the couple's hut was turned into a beautiful temple.

The couple became its caretakers. When they died, they were turned into two trees planted by its entrance.

The locals in Lystra were steeped in this kind of mythology, thus they didn't want to repeat their ancestors' mistake. And because of the miracle healing, they assumed that once again the gods had come incognito. Paul did most of the talking, so they figured he was Hermes, the messenger god - and Barnabas was Zeus. They didn't dare mistreat any divine visitors.

Verse 13, "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.

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...” Remember with a Jewish crowd Paul would start with Hebrew history - but with Gentiles he starts with creation. *Worship the God who made “all things.”*

And I believe this was the most dangerous moment in Paul’s life! *Forget the stonings, beatings, jailings, shipwrecks... Here was Paul’s greatest temptation...*

When explorer, James Cook, came to the Hawaiian islands, the natives thought he was their god, Lono.

But rather than correcting their assumption, he played along. He enjoyed the ruse. For weeks, he was treated like a god. Natives catered to his whims. One night he was about to take advantage of another woman when her husband snuck up and clubbed him over the head.

The blow staggered Cook. He started to bleed and eventually passed out. **The islanders rightly concluded that gods don't bleed, so when Cook woke up they accused him of deceit and murdered him on the spot.**

Paul could’ve pulled a James Cook and enjoyed the perks. But he set the record straight. He was just a man. *“Turn from worthless myths to the living God.”*

And this is why our most dangerous moments are not our times of hardship, but when folks sing our praises, and think of us more highly than they should.

Don't be a James Cook. Remember, "*Saul*" changed his name to "*small*" for a reason. His new name was a constant reminder that *life was all about God, not him*.

Paul continues with a sermon about the living God...

"Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 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. And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them." The crowd was in a frenzy, and not listening.

That's when "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." It's ironic, the crowd is one step away from sacrificing to Paul when his enemies from down the road show up. These jealous Jews mingle among the frenetic crowd, and play on their superstitions. It doesn't take long for them to turn this into a lynching.

This happens more than you think. Today's media specializes in shaping public perception regardless of the reality. They fabricate the heroes and the villains.

And this happened to Paul. The pagans made him *more than he was*, while the Jews painted him as *less than he was*. He went from *hero to bozo* in a few minutes. It was the power of fake news in 48 AD. Paul went from *receiving sacrifices to being the sacrifice*.

Verse 20, “However, when the disciples gathered around him...” Imagine this scene. His friends think Paul is dead. They’re in the midst of planning his funeral. They check his wallet to see if he’s an organ donor, and to notify the next of kin. They size him for a new suit... When suddenly, Luke tells us, “He rose up and went into the city...” What they thought was a corpse staggers to his feet, brushes off the dust and blood, and returns to the city to finish his sermon!

Talk about a guy with guts! I’m sure His enemies asked, “How do you stop a man like this?” The answer was, “*You don’t!*” Paul was *devoted and determined!*

“And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Later Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:4 of an experience he had when he “was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Paul visited heaven and saw sights words cannot express. He wasn’t even sure if he was “in the body or out of the body.” *Was it a vision or had he died?* Apparently, the glories of heaven are too heavenly - they’re too heavy - for mortal men to grasp.

But what's significant about Paul’s revelation of Paradise in 2 Corinthians is that he pinpoints the timing to this particular trip to Galatia. Recall, Stephen saw heaven open as he was stoned. Perhaps the heavens also opened for Paul, during his stoning at Lystra...

Verse 21, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city (Derbe), and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (they went home the way they

came), strengthening the souls of the disciples.” It was closer to Syrian Antioch to go east over the Tarsus mountains, but they backtracked to organize the churches and strengthen new believers.

“Exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Paul taught that persecution is a part of our discipleship. As Amy Carmichael said, “Can he have followed far, who has no wound, no scar?”

Later, when Paul addresses these same Galatians, he speaks of his sincerity, “Let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” He means the scars from his stoning in Lystra. *If anyone doubted Paul's love for Jesus just look at his scars.*

One young man was definitely influenced by those scars. Lystra was Timothy’s hometown. Paul’s future apprentice saw his faithfulness even in persecution.

Verse 23, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” In Acts 6, deacons were selected by the church, but elders were selected by the existing elders.

“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.” Notice, this time Paul preaches in the coastal city of Perga. Perhaps now the weather and climate had changed.

“From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.” They’re back home!

“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’s first mission trip lasted three years. And they saw big breakthroughs among the Gentiles.

Yet they didn’t rest for long. They’ll be off again. But first, there’s an important pastors conference to attend in Jerusalem. And that’s what we’ll look at next week...