

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 14:1-28 | FICKLE CROWDS, FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

KEY TERMS

Word of his grace - A description of the gospel used by Paul (Acts 20:32) and Luke (v. 3) which highlights the essence of the Gospel as grace secured by and through Jesus.

Kingdom of God - The kingdom of God is both the present reality following Jesus' sacrificial death and victorious resurrection (in part), and the future reality that is coming in full when Jesus returns. In verse 22, Paul has the future in mind while encouraging early Christians *to continue in the faith*.

Prayer and fasting - This is the second time prayer and fasting are mentioned together in Acts (13:3 & 14:23). Both instances involve "commissioning," or the specific setting apart of ministers for the Gospel, first when Barnabas and Saul are sent out as missionaries and then when elders are appointed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the towns mentioned in Acts 14 are in Galatia (modern Turkey) and it is likely that Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians when he returned to Antioch (v. 28).

BACKGROUND

Following his sermon in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas travel 90 miles to Iconium where they continue to enter Jewish synagogues and tell people about Jesus. The response continues to be the same with some Jews and many Gentiles believing the message, and other Jews wanting Paul and Barnabas arrested or killed. Learning of threats against them (v. 5-6), they leave Iconium and travel to Lystra and Derbe. In Lystra, Paul heals a man who was *crippled from birth* (v. 8), which is reminiscent of the healing that happened through John and Peter in Acts 3. In response to the healing, the people begin treating Paul and Barnabas as the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. Paul tries to correct the crowd by explaining that he and Barnabas are only human and that they've come to bring good news that is far greater than their man-made gods (vv. 15-17). In contrast to his messages to Jews that focus on Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures, here Paul emphasizes the *worthlessness* of pagan religion and the reality of the *living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them* (v. 15). While in Lystra, a group of Jews from Antioch and Iconium, two cities Paul has been in previously, travel to Lystra and stone Paul, leaving him for dead (v. 19).

However, this doesn't deter Paul as he and Barnabas travel to Derbe where, Luke tells us, they *made many disciples* (v.21). This phrase is the same verb from the Great Commission in Matthew 28 (*make disciples*) and is the only time it occurs in Acts. Paul and Barnabas then head back to Antioch, passing through towns they've previously visited *strengthening the souls of the disciples (and) encouraging them to continue in the faith* (v. 22).

GOING DEEPER

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 2:11-14. What do these verses teach about the role of God's grace in salvation? Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 and Hebrews 4:15-16. What do these verses teach about the present availability of God's grace for his people?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 14:1-28 and make observations. What drives the action? What responses do you see?
2. When gospel mission advances to share “the word of his grace” (v. 3) with new people, resistance and opposition also arise. Oftentimes, the more effective the ministry, the more direct the confrontation. What kinds of opposition do Paul and Barnabas experience in this chapter?
3. In Acts 13, Paul presented the gospel to people with a church background, so he built his argument on the Old Testament and talked about the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38-39). In Acts 14:15-17, Paul presents the gospel to pagan people who do not know or trust the Bible. With this new group, how does Paul make his case to persuade these people toward truth? What arguments, examples, and authorities does he include in this presentation?
4. In verses 21-23, what activities are emphasized to grow the disciples in these new communities? Why are these important to the discipleship in a church?

LIVING THE WORD

5. As we prepare to move into our new building in downtown Edmond, how might our experiences mirror those we see as Paul and Barnabas encounter new people in Acts 14? How will they differ?
6. As you seek to apply this passage to your life, what principles of ministry and follow-up of new contacts or converts do we glean from this passage? How should these shape our church and our small groups?
7. Verse 23 says, “With prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” This is a good reminder that we must always keep the Lord and his care at the forefront of our minds. How does the comfort and care of the living God encourage us in the face of changes and challenges?
8. Close in a time of prayer *committing one another and our church to the Lord in whom we believe.*