

Difficulties on the First Missionary Journey**Lesson Scope:** Acts 14

References in brackets refer to Acts 14 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Having been expelled from Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas continued their first missionary journey southeast through Asia Minor to the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. From Derbe, they could have travelled southeast by land to reach Antioch in Syria. Instead, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps in Asia Minor, “confirming the souls of the disciples.” They returned to these cities at the risk of persecution.

While we do not seek to antagonize men, fearlessly proclaiming God’s Word will bring offense to the world. This principle is evident through the apostles’ experiences in Asia Minor.

Many who reject God’s Word oppose His messengers. Instead of giving up, these messengers strengthen themselves in God and move forward into other areas of service.

God’s people have experienced opposition ever since the beginning of time. The prophets in the Old Testament were killed for speaking the truth. Jesus was killed, though He was blameless.

Many New Testament saints were martyred for the faith. During the Reformation in the 1500s, thousands of Anabaptists were tortured and killed. Though we have experienced relative goodwill with our fellow citizens in recent years, the world is still not “a friend to grace.” Stress the importance of living the separated life every day, everywhere we Go, it will be costly to deny self and follow God, but in the end, it will be worth all our efforts.

Lesson Aim: To teach a Christian response to opposition.

Theme Verse: John 16:33. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Lesson Text

Encountering Jewish Envy

Acts 14:1-7

¹ (KJV) And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. ³ Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. ⁵ And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them, ⁶ They were aware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: ⁷ And there they preached the gospel.

Confronting Pagan Error

Acts 14:8-20

⁸ (KJV) And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: ⁹ The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰ Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. ¹¹ And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. ¹² And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercuries, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. ¹⁴ Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard *of*, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, ¹⁵ And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: ¹⁶ Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. ¹⁸ And with these sayings

scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. ¹⁹ And there came thither *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead. ²⁰ Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Confirming the Disciples

Acts 14:21-28

²¹ (KJV) And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. ²⁴ And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: ²⁶ And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. ²⁸ And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Questions for Study

Encountering Jewish Envy

1. Why can we expect opposition when we are proclaiming the Gospel?
2. What wrong responses may we be tempted with in the face of opposition?
3. How should we properly respond to such opposition?

Confronting Pagan Error

4. Why are the individual needs we encounter especially important? (14:8-10)?
5. Why would it hinder our witness to accept the credit for any good that is accomplished (14:13-15)?
6. Why must we clearly identify with God's people in our witnessing and daily work?

Confirming the Disciples

7. List some ingredients for sound church life from 14:23.
8. How is discipleship costly?
9. How is the faithful servant amply rewarded?

Analysing the Passage

Faith still comes by hearing the Word (14:21). Preaching is the primary method by which truth is proclaimed.

Boldly (14:3) means “to be frank in utterance or confident in spirit and demeanour.”

Assault (14:5) means “intention of violence,” not the acts of violence.

According to Strong’s, assault means “a violent impulse, onset.”

Like passions (14:15) is the same Greek word used in James 5:17 to describe Elijah. Paul was indicating that he and Barnabas were altogether human, just as the people of Lystra were.

His stoning likely produced the marks which Paul said he bore on his body. (See Galatians 6:17.) The people thought Paul was dead and dragged him out of the city. God miraculously restored his health and strength.

Confirming (14:22) means “to support further, re-establish.”

Principles and Applications

Encountering Jewish Envy

1. We should expect opposition when people are turning to the Gospel (14:1-2). Jesus foretold opposition for His followers. This fact should not discourage us from spreading the Gospel. Rather, we should seek God’s wisdom and protection as we go forth with the Gospel. We fear God rather than man. If persecution or harm should come to us, God will help us endure faithfully.
2. In the face of opposition, we must continue to proclaim the Gospel forthrightly (14:3). As humans, we shrink from conflict. We may be tempted to water down the message of God’s Word in order to avoid conflict. Rather than being ashamed of the Gospel, we respond as Peter did: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (5:29). No matter how hard men try to hinder or destroy the truth, it will triumph.
3. Moving to other fields of labour because of opposition is not wrong (14:5-7). A decision to go elsewhere should be made only after much

prayer and seeking the Holy Spirit's direction. However, Jesus did command His disciples, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matthew 10:23).

4. Wherever we go, we should remember our primary calling to proclaim the Gospel (14:7). It is not our teaching or ideas that men need to hear. They must rather hear God's Word, which is able to save their souls. While we proclaim the Gospel to men, we are also busy living out an example of the Gospel in our daily lives.

Confronting Pagan Error

5. While proclaiming the Gospel to the multitudes, we should remain alert to the needs of the individual (14:8-10). We are the hands and feet God uses to reach needy people. Do I take time to help someone in need, or am I so busy watching for larger opportunities for service that I miss obvious needs around me each day? Each soul is worth more than the whole world. Make it your goal today to help at least one person; no deed of kindness will lose its reward.

6. We must be intent upon directing all glory away from ourselves and to the Lord (14:14-15). Wanting the praise and admiration of men has ensnared many Christians. While we want to live blamelessly before men, our goal is not to receive lots of comments about our family, our business or our church. Rather, we want to reflect God's glory to those who observe our lives. God created us, and He redeemed us. All we have and are is a gift from God.

7. We must rigorously confront erroneous thinking with truth (14:15). Paul and Barnabas did not skirt the issue to keep the favour of men. Instead, they tore their clothes, ran in among the people, and cried aloud, to keep the men from sacrificing to them. We are also obligated to speak out against evils such as divorce and remarriage, dishonesty, destruction of human life, and so forth.

8. We must be willing to identify with the despised, persecuted people of God (14:19-20). Barnabas and the disciples gathered around Paul's mutilated body. They were not afraid or ashamed to be identified with Paul. God promises to be a Father to those who separate themselves from the world and identify with God's people. This identification with God's people includes our dress, our speech, and every part of our lives. When Christ returns He will claim for His bride those who are part of the unspotted church of God. Let us be found among the faithful!

Confirming the Disciples

9. As we present the Gospel, we must teach that discipleship is costly (14:22). It may cost friendships, family ties, occupation, or personal ambitions. It has even cost the physical lives of many Christians. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25).

10. Stable church life fills an important place in fortifying believers to face opposition (14:23). Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches they had planted, to encourage them, pray with them, and establish leadership in each congregation. They did not consider the church as the work of their hands, but they “commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

11. We should find our greatest fulfillment in knowing that God’s work is prospering (14:27). When the work of God’s kingdom comes first, there are willing workers available for the service of the church such as mission fields, school teaching, and serving in the local congregation. Our children will also grasp a vision of the important work at hand. Service in God’s kingdom is the all-important goal of our lives; all else perishes with time and sense.

Important Teachings

1. We should expect opposition when people are turning to the Gospel (14:1-2).
2. In the face of opposition, we must continue to proclaim the Gospel forthrightly (14:3).
3. Moving to other fields of labour because of opposition is not wrong (14:5-7).
4. Wherever we go, we should remember our primary calling to proclaim the Gospel (14:7).
5. While proclaiming the Gospel to the multitudes, we should remain alert to the needs of the individual (14:8-10).
6. We must be intent upon directing all glory away from ourselves and to the Lord (14:14-15).
7. We must rigorously confront erroneous thinking with truth (14:15).
8. We must be willing to identify with the despised, persecuted people of God (14:19-20).
9. As we present the Gospel, we must teach that discipleship is costly

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10. Stable church life fills an important place in fortifying believers to face opposition (14:23).

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Answers to Questions

1. Why can we expect opposition when we are proclaiming the Gospel? Jesus foretold that we would experience opposition as we follow His example. We are entering the battleground between God and Satan when we attempt to rescue the souls of men. The Gospel message is counter to the desires of carnal men.

2. What wrong responses may we be tempted with in the face of opposition?

We may be tempted to remain quiet to avoid conflict. Or we may try to water down the message to be accepted by more people. Opposition can bring discouragement.

3. How should we properly respond to such opposition?

We should respond as the apostles did in Acts 5:41: "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." We must remember that the enemy is not opposing us as much as He is opposing God and His kingdom.

4. Why are the individual needs we encounter especially important? (14:8-10)?

We can relate to individuals' needs, and can make a difference to them, one person at a time. Am I reaching out to those closest to me at home, at work, at church, in my community? Or am I failing to meet the individual needs while waiting for some "great" need to help in?

5. Why would it hinder our witness to accept the credit for any good that is accomplished (14:13-15)?

We are but debtors to God for all He has done for us. When we do all we should do for God, we are still unprofitable servants. We have nothing of ourselves to offer people; we can only point them to Christ Jesus, the door of salvation.

6. Why must we clearly identify with God's people in our witnessing and our daily work?

If we are ashamed of Jesus, He will be ashamed of us at His coming. This identity with God's people is an ongoing test. How will we dress our children? What vehicles will we drive? How much will we spend on ourselves, and how much will we give back to God? Do our neighbours see that we have been with God?

7. List some ingredients for sound church life from 14:23.

Ordaining ample leadership, praying together, beseeching God's direction and blessing, fasting, commending brethren to God who is able, and believing on God are all very essential to sound congregational church life.

8. How is discipleship costly?

It requires a giving up of personal comforts, ambitions, and family at times, to serve in the work of the kingdom but the child of God views any sacrifice for God as small in comparison to all that Christ has done for us.

9. How is the faithful servant amply rewarded?

There is joy in Christian service. We rejoice to see others turning to God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The greatest reward will be to enter into the joy of our Lord in heaven.

Summarizing the Lesson

In our walk with God today, we should expect opposition to come.

We are involved in an intense battle between God and Satan. We know which side will triumph. Will you and I be on God's side, in the ultimate triumph? We can know this answer by how we are responding to God's Word and His church today.

Research Guide

For inspiration, read Scriptures such as Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1.

These and other prophets were forewarned of opposition.