

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING
XXXIV. God's Long-Term Encouragement With Short-Term Persecution
(Acts 14:7-22)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 14:7-22 records how events led to the traumatic stoning of Paul, what could have easily discouraged him and his ministry team from continuing their important ministry. However, in the long-term view, the **value** of this event provides enormous encouragement, providing an important lesson for our edification (as follows):

II. God's Long-Term Encouragement With Short-Term Persecution, Acts 14:7-22.

- A. In the short-term, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra was not encouraging, Acts 14:7-22:
 - 1. Having fled from Iconium to the region of Lystra and Derbe, cities of the area of Lycaonia, Paul and Barnabas continued their practice of preaching the Gospel of Christ, Acts 14:6-7.
 - 2. When Paul saw a man who had been crippled since birth hearing him speak at Lystra, and Paul perceived by the Holy Spirit's leading that this man had the faith to be healed, Paul said with a loud voice for all the bystanders to hear, "Stand upright on thy feet!" and the man leaped up and walked, Acts 14:8-10 KJV.
 - 3. The bystanders cried out that the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men (Acts 14:11), a reaction rising from a Greek legend connected with Lystra and familiar to Paul's listeners: it held that the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes visited the elderly Lystrian couple Philemon and Baucis, and "abundantly rewarded" them "for their hospitality." (Ibid., p. 391; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 14:12)
 - 4. The people called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes" ["Jupiter" and "Mercurius" in the KJV] since Paul was the chief speaker, Acts 14:12. (Ibid., Ryrie; "Zeus was the chief god and Hermes the messenger equivalent to the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury, respectively," Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 392.
 - 5. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and woolen garlands that were placed on the animals to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, so the apostles reacted by tearing their clothes, a sign of "strong aversion to blasphemy," and ran out among the people, announcing that they were mere men like the bystanders, and they preached about the Creator God, Acts 14:13-17 NIV.
 - 6. Paul and Barnabas were scarcely able to restrain the people from performing sacrifices unto them, but when Jewish foes of the apostles arrived at Lystra from Antioch and Iconium, they turned the fickle pagan crowd against the apostles so that they stoned Paul, drawing him out of the city for the wild animals to devour, believing him to be dead, Acts 14:18-19!
 - 7. However, as the disciples stood around Paul's body, he rose up and came into the city and the next day continued with Barnabas on to Derbe to minister there, Acts 14:20.
 - 8. Having preached and discipled many people in Derbe, the apostles returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening and encouraging the disciples in those cities to continue in the Christian faith, saying that they must face much tribulation before entering the Millennial Kingdom, Acts 14:21-22; Ibid.
- B. Yet, in the long-term, the apostles' ministry at Lystra was of great value, a big encouragement for the Church:
 - 1. In the town of Lystra where Paul was stoned lived Timothy, the son of a Hebrew woman and a Greek man, and Timothy would later become a believer and a co-worker with Paul, Acts 16:1-3. (2 Timothy 1:1-5)
 - 2. Later, in writing to Timothy, Paul would remind him of the trials that Timothy knew well that Paul had faced at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (2 Timothy 3:11), and how Timothy himself needed to realize that all who lived godly in Christ Jesus would similarly suffer persecution, 2 Timothy 3:12.
 - 3. Paul's pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy have since helped numerous pastors know how to minister to millions of believers in Church History, what would not have occurred had Paul not ministered in Lystra where he was stoned! Long-term, his work at Lystra was vital to the discipling of millions of believers!

Lesson: *Though the ministry of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra in the short-term appeared to be discouraging, they kept at the effort and ministered in Derbe before returning to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening and encouraging the disciples to face persecution before entering the Kingdom. Yet, in the long-term in Church History, the apostles' ministry at Lystra by way of Timothy's discipling became very edifying and encouraging!*

Application: *May we not get discouraged over short-term persecution but trust in God's long-term use of it!*