

## Acts 14

The more I read the Bible the more I see how perfectly God uses sinful situations. We saw how religious persecution forced the church to scatter the evangelism effort all over Asia and northern Africa. We saw how a heated argument between Paul and Barnabas caused them to divide and be able to do more of God's work in two teams, instead of one. We are now seeing how the gospel is well received and flourishing in so many new places. We are also seeing that the persecutions from the Judaizers follows the evangelists like a dog. Even so, these evil deeds also help the gospel spread even further, by forcing the apostles and evangelists to leave for another town instead of just staying in one place. This chapter shows us how even Greek mythology ultimately is used to open the door for the gospel.

**Read Acts 14:1-18:** Barnabas and Saul saw the same pattern of new explosive salvation and growth in Iconium. The gospel was widely received; and accordingly, then the resulting Satanic persecutions followed like clockwork. The team fled to the area of Lycaonia. This next stop became a great example of how God used idolatry to open the people's minds to the gospel. There was something called The Legend of Lycaon.

This Greek legend was about a character called the King of Arcadia, who disregarded the existence of Zeus (the highest Greek idol). As the story goes, Zeus came to town posing as an old man into this area and was disregarded by everyone except one old couple. Zeus struck down all of the males with lightning, except for this old couple.

What does this made-up story have to do with Paul's missionary stop in this same place? Mythology is often an effort to explain the unexplainable. It also served as an anecdotal tale with an underlying message (like a fable). In the case of the Legend of Lycaonia, the message was that god is among us, and you need to be watchful for those exhibiting his characteristics. The Greeks believed in many gods. When Paul performed a healing, the people were quick to connect their legend to this event.

There were a couple of other confirmations that caused the locals to declare Barnabas to be Zeus and Paul to be Hermes/Mercury. Their characteristics happen to fit the narrative. Barnabas was a bigger man, and Zeus is the boss god. Like Barnabas, Zeus was well known for hospitality. Like Zeus, Barnabas was a traveler who just showed up unannounced. Similarly, Paul was declared to be Hermes/Mercury because he was obviously the capable spokesman or the messenger of the gods. He was an eloquent wordsmith. Hermes was also the one who guided men the underworld after death. Accordingly, Paul spoke of heaven and hell and how to get there.

Obviously, Paul freaked out when the locals started treating them like gods. That would be the worst thing an evangelist could do. Paul broke the bad news to them. Their gods were imaginary; and they were normal men.

**Read Acts 14:19-28:** This is the infamous story about Paul being stoned to death and left for dead. Ironically, Paul was holding the robes as men threw stones to martyr Stephen.

Was he just unconscious, or did God raise him from the dead? Paul describes a man who died and went to heaven; and returned to being alive. He described what heaven was like. He describes the effect of potentially thinking of himself as special; which was diminished because of his ongoing eye infection.

*12 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. <sup>3</sup> And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup> how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. <sup>5</sup> Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. <sup>6</sup> For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. <sup>7</sup> And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. (2 Corinthians 12)*

The passage in **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** does not specify a particular year for the event it describes. However, it is generally believed to refer to an experience Paul had approximately **14 years** prior to the writing of this letter.

If we assume that Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** around **55-57 AD**, the experience would date back to about **41-43 AD**. This timeline is an estimate and is based on historical context rather than a specific year mentioned in the text.

The events described in **Acts 14**, particularly Paul's first missionary journey, are generally believed to have taken place around **45-49 AD**. This journey includes significant events in cities like Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The date is an estimation based on historical context and the timing of Paul's ministry, but it does not specify an exact year within those boundaries. It is possible that Paul is describing himself as the man who went to heaven.

In general, it is impossible to die and come back alive; unless God performs a miracle. John and a number of prophets went in the spirit to heaven to record some things in scripture.

*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27)*

We are transitioning out of pure evangelism into setting up leaders and local church oversight. It is much more efficient to deal with one like-minded contact in each location than to go *cat herding*. At the end of this journey, the return to missionary headquarters at Antioch, to report on all that God had done.