

## Acts 14

### *Sticks and Stoned*

? Do you feel like you've ever suffered for doing something good?

#### **Previously In Acts**

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and build the global church. The book also introduces us to the Apostle Paul – one of the Church's first missionaries, and one of Christianity's most important theologians. Up until this point in Acts, we've seen Paul – who was once a harsh persecutor of Christians named Saul – convert to Christianity and become one of most vocal advocates. Paul becomes friends with another strong Christian leader named Barnabas, and the two men set off on their first missionary journey, aimed at spreading the Gospel of Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. However, this journey is not without its trials and, as we will continue to see, Paul faces staunch opposition.

#### **Part One: Revival of the Fittest**

##### **Acts 14:1-7 (NIV)**

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. <sup>2</sup> But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup> So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. <sup>4</sup> But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, <sup>6</sup> they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup> and there they continued to preach the gospel.

? Verse one states that Paul and Barnabas spoke in such a way that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. Do you think it takes a special gift to spread the Gospel?

? Verse three talks about how God's miracles "bore witness" to Paul's message of His grace. How has God confirmed His grace in your own life?

? How can we use these personal displays of God's grace to help spread the Gospel today? .

## Part Two: Papa Does Preach

### Acts 14:8-18 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup> said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. <sup>11</sup> And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. <sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup> “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. <sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” <sup>18</sup> Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

? Why do you think that the people of Lystra mistook Paul’s miracle as a sign that he and Barnabas were gods?

? Much like the people of Lystra mistakenly attributed the work of God to their own gods, how do we sometimes miss the work God is doing in our lives or attribute it to other things?

? How can we guard our hearts and our church from this type of destructive persuasion?

## Part Three: Rock Bottom

### Acts 14:8-18 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. <sup>20</sup> But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup> When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

? What might Paul have thought, when he realized those seeking to stone and kill him, were pursuing him from town to town?

**Read Aloud:** Acts 4:29-31 shows how Peter, John and their friends had previously prayed for strength in the face of opposition:

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

### Stone Cold Execution

According to numerous first-century sources, a typical stoning in first century Judaism looked like this: At least two eye-witnesses to the accused person’s crime had to be present, then the accused’s hands were bound behind them and they were pushed, face-first off a drop-off that was twice their height (or more than 18-feet in some accounts) before the two witnesses thrust a heavy rock into the accused’s chest. If the victim wasn’t dead by this point, anyone who believe they were guilty was free to pick up a stone and throw/drop it on the person from the top of the pit. Whether the accused lived or died during this process was believed to be left to God’s judgment. Without question, these stoning’s would have been extraordinarily painful and often resulting in lifelong scarring, if not death.

? After reading the passage from Acts 4, what do you think encouraged the Jews to continue preaching – even in the face of strong opposition?

? Why do you think Paul decided to return to the places that had rejected him and even tried to stone him the first time he preached the Gospel?

? Have you ever tried to share the Gospel but walked away hurt from the experience? What happened?

? Verse 22 says that, after being stoned, Paul encouraged the disciples “to continue in the faith.” What can we do to fill ourselves with the same level of endurance and courage to spread the Gospel?

### For Discussion and Accountability

? How does God “bear witness” or testify to His faithfulness in my life?

? How might being better aware of God's work in my life on a daily basis encourage me to further the Gospel?