

ACTS 14 — THE GOSPEL ADVANCES THROUGH SUFFERING

Big Picture

Acts 14 concludes Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey and demonstrates that the expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world will not occur without opposition, suffering, and sacrifice. As the missionaries travel through Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, they encounter both remarkable success and fierce persecution.

The chapter highlights:

- The power of the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles
- Signs and wonders confirming the apostolic message
- The danger of idolatry and false worship
- The inevitability of suffering in Christian mission
- The strengthening and organization of local churches
- The unstoppable advance of God's kingdom

Acts 14 teaches that the mission of the church advances not through comfort or popularity, but through faithful witness empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Structure of the Chapter

- 14:1–7 — Ministry and Opposition in Iconium
- 14:8–18 — Healing the Crippled Man at Lystra
- 14:19–20 — Paul Stoned at Lystra
- 14:21–23 — Strengthening the Churches and Appointing Elders
- 14:24–28 — Return to Antioch and Mission Report

Key Themes

The Gospel Creates Both Faith and Opposition (14:1–7)

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas preach in the synagogue, and many Jews and Greeks believe. Yet opposition immediately arises. Acts repeatedly shows a consistent pattern:

- The gospel is proclaimed
- Some believe
- Others reject it
- Opposition intensifies

- The gospel continues advancing

The division created by the gospel reveals that Jesus forces a response. Neutrality is ultimately impossible.

Even in the midst of opposition, Paul and Barnabas remain bold.

Verse 3 says: “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.”

This passage teaches:

- Miracles confirm the gospel
- Signs point to Christ
- The message remains central

The apostles eventually flee when violence escalates, demonstrating wisdom and strategic perseverance rather than recklessness.

The Gospel Confronts Idolatry (14:8–18)

In Lystra, Paul heals a man crippled from birth. The miracle parallels Peter’s healing of the lame man in Acts 3 and demonstrates continuity between the ministries of Peter and Paul. Yet the crowd completely misunderstands the miracle. Believing the gods have appeared in human form, they identify Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes

This moment reveals one of the great missionary challenges: People often interpret the gospel through the lens of their existing worldview and religious assumptions.

Paul and Barnabas respond by tearing their garments in horror and redirecting attention away from themselves toward the living God.

Paul’s message to the pagan crowd is especially important because he does not begin with Scripture or Israel’s history. Instead, he begins with:

- Creation
- Rain
- Seasons
- Food
- God’s providential care

This demonstrates that:

- God has revealed Himself through creation
- The nations are accountable to the Creator
- Idolatry is ultimately empty and futile

The apostles call the people to turn “from these vain things to a living God.”

Suffering Is Normal in Christian Mission (14:19–20)

The same crowds that wanted to worship Paul soon stone him and drag him outside the city, believing him to be dead. Acts highlights the instability of human approval:

- Crowds are fickle
- Popularity is temporary
- Faithfulness often leads to suffering

Paul's suffering mirrors the pattern of Jesus Himself.

The gospel advances through cruciform ministry—that is, ministry shaped by sacrifice, endurance, and self-giving love.

Remarkably, Paul survives and immediately continues the mission.

This demonstrates:

- Apostolic perseverance
- Courage rooted in the Spirit
- Commitment to the mission above personal safety

Christian Mission Includes Church Formation (14:21–23)

Paul and Barnabas do not merely seek conversions.

They return to the churches they planted in order to:

- Strengthen disciples
- Encourage perseverance
- Establish leadership
- Organize local congregations

Verse 22 contains one of the most important theological statements in Acts: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Acts teaches that suffering is not abnormal for Christians.

The kingdom has already begun through Christ, but believers still live in a world marked by opposition, persecution, and spiritual conflict.

The apostles also appoint elders in every church.

This demonstrates that:

- Local church leadership matters
- Churches require stability and shepherding
- Mission includes discipleship and organization
- Prayer and fasting accompany spiritual leadership

Christian mission is not complete until believers are formed into stable communities of worship, discipleship, and leadership.

The Church Participates in God's Mission (14:24–28)

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, the church that originally sent them out.

They report: “all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”

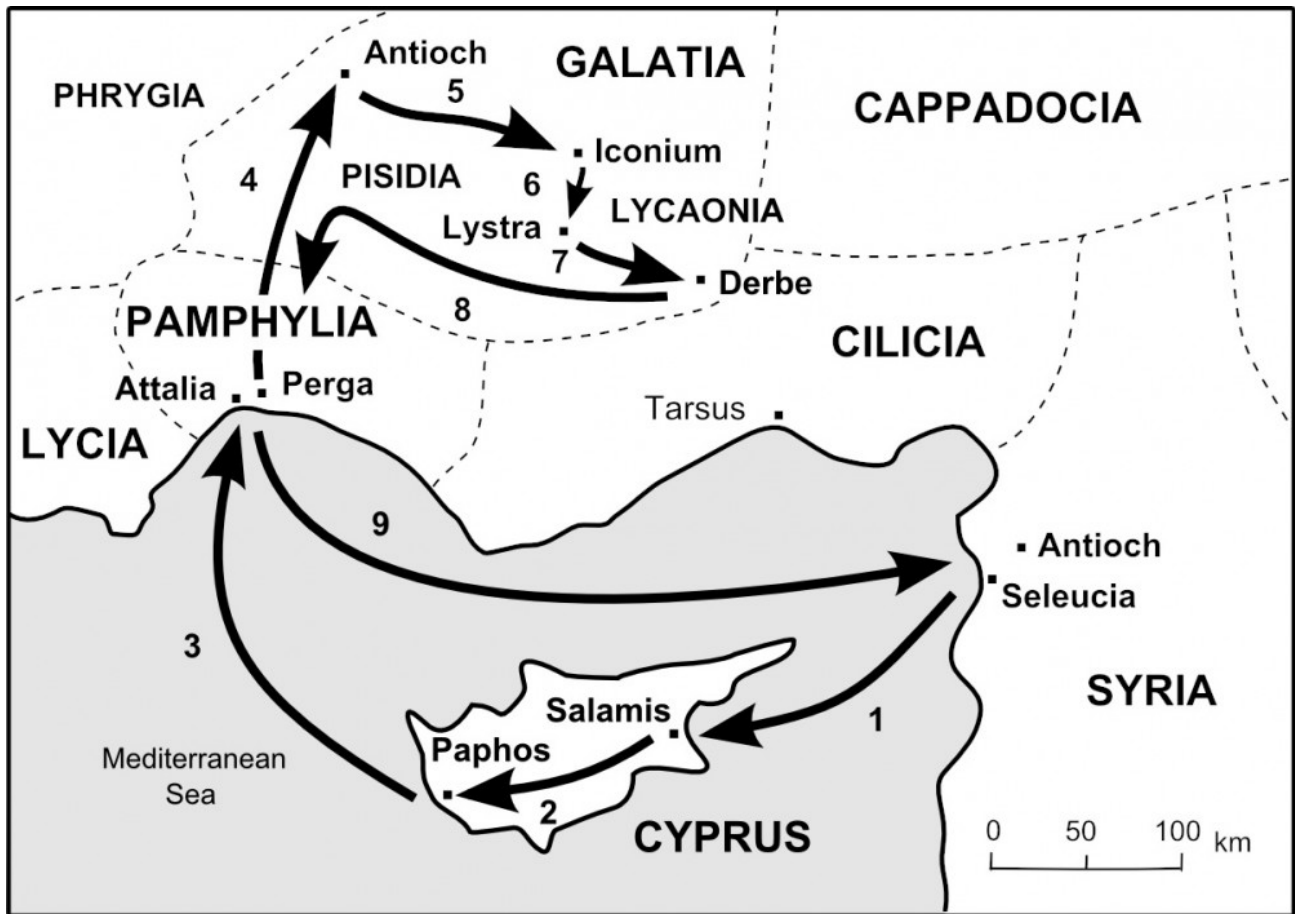
This passage reminds us:

- Mission belongs to God
- The church sends and supports missionaries
- Missionaries remain accountable to the church
- Gentile inclusion is central to God's redemptive plan

The phrase “opened a door of faith” emphasizes that salvation and mission are ultimately works of divine grace.

Major Themes in Acts 14

- **The Gospel Advances Through Suffering.** Acts 14 repeatedly connects Christian mission with persecution and hardship.
- **The Gospel Is for All Nations.** The mission to the Gentiles continues expanding beyond Jewish boundaries.
- **Signs and Wonders Confirm the Gospel.** Miracles authenticate the apostolic message and point people toward Christ.
- **Idolatry Cannot Save.** Human religion and false gods are powerless compared to the living Creator.
- **The Church Must Be Strengthened and Organized.** Mission includes discipleship, leadership development, and church formation.
- **God's Mission Cannot Be Stopped.** Neither persecution, violence, nor opposition can prevent the advance of the kingdom of God.



¹ Map is from <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/9-pauls-journey-to-cyprus-pamphylia-galatia-paul-starts-his-1st-missionary-journey/>.