

# Explore the Bible: September 15

*The Truth • Acts 14:11-23*

*By Becky Brown*



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Paul experienced difficult labors, imprisonments, and beatings. He was scourged with lashes and caned with rods. He was shipwrecked three times. For a night and a day, he floated in the deep brown sea without a ship. He was stranded in rivers and robbed. His own Jewish countrymen treated him as badly as Gentile foreigners. Dangers in the city and in the wilderness accosted him. False "brethren" broke his heart. Sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, and exposure to the elements

were daily battles. Unceasingly, he experienced deep concern for the new believers and new churches being birthed as he traveled.

At their first stop on Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas were challenged by a magician who sought to derail their work for Christ. This response proved they would face opposition at every post. Arriving at Antioch in Pisidia, Paul would preach his first recorded message. Local listeners wanted to hear more but the Jews allowed their jealousy to derail the infant ministry. They had done what they were told: share first with the Jews, but if they don't listen, share the message with the Gentiles. The Gentiles began to hear and receive the gospel gladly. They departed for Iconium.

In Iconium, the team experienced victories among both Jews and Gentiles. However, unbelieving Jews once again made trouble for Paul and Barnabas. They were threatened with being stoned to death. Such a threat was the impetus for them to depart for the towns of Lystra and Derbe. As they were preaching the gospel, a man lame from birth was there in Lystra. God gave Paul the opportunity to see this man leap to his feet and walk for the first time ever!

The people in this area of Asia Minor believed in mythological gods (little "g"). In many of the cities, there were temples of worship run by local priests dedicated to these powerless gods. When this miracle of healing helped the lame man walk, the people decided that Paul and Barnabas were mythological gods. They named Paul "Zeus" and Barnabas "Hermes." They brought oxen and garlands of flowers and attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas with sacrificial gifts.

Of course, Paul and Barnabas completely rejected such false tributes and pagan beliefs. They gave glory to the one and only Living God: The Maker of heaven, earth, and sea. They gave God the credit for provision of all of their needs such as rains from heaven which provided crops and full provision

for nourishment. They refused these pagan sacrifices, making sure the people knew their allegiance was to God and God alone.

Jews who had been antagonistic to the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium came and incited the crowds in Lystra to stone Paul. He was thought to be dead and was dragged out of the city. The new “disciples” in Lystra surrounded the body of Paul and watched as he arose and stood. God had preserved the life of Paul through the stoning. Few people who were punished in this way survived. Some commentators believe that God raised Paul from the dead. That is what I believe as well. Paul’s job was not over.

From Lystra, they went to Derbe. They preached in that town and saw many come to faith. On the second missionary journey, Paul would return to this area and find a young man named Timothy who would become his own “son” in the faith. I have wondered if Timothy was there to witness the stoning of Paul in Lystra.

They risked their lives to return to Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia for the purpose of encouraging the new believers there. They “strengthened the souls” of these disciples. They appointed elders in every new church family. They fasted and spent time in prayer. They “commissioned” these new leaders to stand firm in their faith.

When our missionaries have served a period of time on the field, they return home for stateside assignment. They report, rest, recuperate and return. Paul and Barnabas observed the very first missionary furlough. They reported to their sending church all that the Lord had accomplished on the field.

*Brown leads LittleBrownLight Ministries.*