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Paul's Message in Iconium 14: 1-7

45-46 AD

Paul's message in Iconium DIG: Why did Paul and Barnabas stay in Iconium for a considerable amount of time? How does Paul and Barnabas' experience in Iconium differ from Pisidian Antioch? How is it similar? What is the purpose of signs and wonders here (also see 6:8)? Why are the people divided? What did Jesus say about people being divided over the gospel? How did the violence against Paul and Barnabas increase from when they were in Pisidian Antioch?

REFLECT: Can you speak with boldness for your Lord? Once we accept Messiah as our Lord and Savior, we are eternally secure (see the commentary on The Life of Christ, to see link click Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer), but what about our physical well-being? Does the Bible teach that we cannot be harmed or killed for proclaiming the gospel or being a believer? Seeing Paul and Barnabas' courage, faith, and endurance, how are you challenged to serve the Lord more completely? How should we determine when to trust God to protect us supernaturally and when to run for our lives?

Between **Paul's** tenacity and **Barnabas'** encouragement, neither lacked motivation, even after leaving **Pisidian Antioch** in a cloud of **dust**. By the time **they** could see **Iconium** in the distance, they were spilling over with the kind of joyful anticipation that can only come from the filling of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. A new challenge awaited **them**. Perhaps more of a challenge than **they** expected.[305]

Iconium was some ninety miles southwest of Pisidian **Antioch** on the Via Sebaste, the main route that connected the Roman colonies established by Augustus – Comama, Cremna, Parlais, **Antioch**, **Iconium** and Lystra. **It** was in the central part of what is today Konya in Turkey, a rugged location on a plateau some 3,370 feet above sea level. To reach **the town**, **Paul and Barnabas** would have had to cross

the mountain range running between Pisidian **Antioch** and Philomelium, and then descend into the Lycaonian plains. **Iconium** was partially Hellenized by the Seleucids, until it came under Roman influence in 65 BC when emperor Claudius granted the town the use of his name as an honorary prefix, hence it became known as Claud**iconium**. It was an important crossroad, lying on routes running westward to Pisidian **Antioch** and Ephesus and south to Lystra and Derbe, and was a thriving center when **Paul and Barnabas** arrived.[306]

Now the same thing happened in Iconium as in Pisidian **Antioch – they both entered as usual into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a large number of Jewish and God-fearing Greek people believed. But** if some were united in faith, others were united in opposition, and trouble soon arose because **the Judaizers, Jewish people who would not believe** (see the commentary on **Galatians,to see link click Ag – Who Were the Judaizers**) stirred **up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers** by an unscrupulous slander campaign **(14:1-2).**

So precisely because of the rise of opposition that the missionaries felt, **they stayed there a considerable time, speaking boldly in the Lord** to help consolidate the infant believers there. Far from being intimidated, **they** were inspired to be even more **bold**. **Boldness** is essential for spreading **the Good News**. It is what enables believers to persist in the face of opposition. **Boldness** certainly defined **Paul**. To **the Thessalonians he** wrote: **After we had first suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to tell you the Good News of God – even in the midst of much opposition (First Thessalonians 2:2;** also see **Acts 9:27-28, 13:46** and **19:8).** That **he** would continue to speak with **boldness** was his constant concern **(Ephesians 6:19-20; Philippians 1:19-20)**.

Boldness also marked the early preaching of **Peter and John**. Sternly warned by the Great Sanhedrin to stop preaching in the name of **Yeshua, they replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you decide. For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:19-20).** When **Peter and John** reported the Sanhedrin's threats to the rest of the Messianic community, their response was to pray for even greater **boldness, "And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant Your servants to speak Your word with courage" (4:29).**[307]

As the two missionaries continued **to testify to the message of Yeshua's**

grace, they were authenticated as true spokesmen of **God** by the **granting signs and wonders to come about by their hands (Acts 14:3,** also see **15:12**; **Galatians 3:5** and **Hebrews 2:4).** Once again we see that the ability to perform **signs and wonders** in **Acts** was limited to **the apostles**. And it could very well be that the reference **Paul** makes in **Galatians 3:5** pointed to these events: **So then, the One who gives you the Ruach and works miracles among you – does He do it because of your deeds based on Torah or your hearing based on truth and faithfulness.**



But like Pisidian **Antioch**, **Iconium** became a polarized, smoldering cauldron. Eventually, **the city** erupted in response to the confrontational preaching of **the** two **men** and **the population split** in two**. Some were with the** unbelieving **Jewish leaders and some were with the apostles.** This means that there were more than twelve **apostles** (see**Romans 16:7**), even though the role of **the Twelve** is unique**(Matthew 19:28; Revelation 21:14)**; indeed **Ephesians 4:11** suggests that the office of **apostle** continues to be a gift to **the Messianic Community.**

This is always the case. **Christ** won't let you sit on the fence. The gospel always divides people into one of two families. You are either in the family of **God**, or the family of Satan. **Yeshua Himself** declared: **Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. Yeshua** is not to rule in glory at **His** First Coming; **He** is not at that time to fulfill the Messianic prophecies of world peace: **They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).** For this reason, **He** will **bring division**. Families, both Jewish and Gentile, have been **divided** and loyalties broken because of our **Savior**. Jewish believers are still ostracized from their families and friends if they believe

Yeshua is **Messiah**. But to be **His** disciple we must count the costs.

Some will acknowledge **Him** as **Meshiach**, while others will not, so **families** will be split down the middle over this issue **(Matthew 10:34-39)**. **From now on** means that the **division** did not start after **Jesus'** death and resurrection but had already begun beforehand, **there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.** Then **Yeshua** quotes from **Micah 7:6**, and gives specific examples of the coming **division**: **They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).**

Interestingly enough, just as the Pharisees and the Herodians overcame their mutual dislike for each other to oppose **Yeshua**, some **Jews** and **Gentiles** temporarily overcame **their** aversion to one another for a common cause.[308] The smoldering **division** eventually burst into flame and **an attempt** (Greek: *horme*, meaning *a rush or an assault*) **was made by both Gentiles and Jewish people, along with their rulers,** on the lives of **the** two **missionaries.** The verb form of *horme* appears in **19:29**, where it describes the assault on **Paul's** companions by the mob at **Ephesus**. No doubt a similar scene of mob violence took place at **Iconium**, as the unruly crowd sought **to abuse and stone them.**[309] **The pattern of resistance increased from merely driving them out of their district to both Jews and Gentiles threatening to stone them.**

But they found out about it crossed the border into the Roman province of Galatia, **and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra** (some 18 miles or 29 km distant) **and Derbe** (some 55 miles or 89 km further) **and the surrounding countryside (14:4-6).** Although **Luke** does not specify the source of information regarding the intended plot, it may be surmised that some (or many) of the new believers possessed well-paced connections with colleagues, friends, or partners and been able to alert **the** two **men** to the pending danger.[310] **Paul and Barnabas** were **bold,** but not foolish. **Their** flight was an act of prudence, not cowardice. **Yeshua** had told the Twelve: **When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another (Matthew 10:23).** There was obviously nothing more they could accomplish by remaining in **Iconium**, so it was time to move on to new territory where the gospel was needed. As it had done earlier in **Acts 8:1-4**, persecution merely pushed **the Good News** of forgiveness and salvation into new regions **(14:7)**.

Spirit of God, Your *Word says:* ***The naïve believes every word, but the shrewd discerns their steps (Proverbs 14:15).*** *May I not be afraid to use the wits and wisdom* ***You*** *have given me to be part of* ***Your*** *blessing in my life. I trust* ***You*** *unconditionally in whatever way* ***You*** *choose to keep* ***Your*** *promises, knowing that* ***You*** *are my* ***refuge, and underneath*** *me* ***are Your everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27).***