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Paul's Return to Syrian Antioch
14: 20b-28

48 AD
Paul wrote Galatians (about salvation), part of the Big four (**to see link click Ad – Letters of Paul**)**, from Syrian Antioch in 48 AD.**

Paul's return to Syrian Antioch DIG: After the treatment Paul and Barnabas received in Lystra, how would you feel if you were one of these new believers when you had heard that they had come back? From what they have seen in Paul and Barnabas, what would these new believers realize about their ministry? Reviewing Paul's first missionary journey of about 1,100 miles, what do you learn about Paul? About the gospel? How does this passage refute the teachings of the prosperity gospel?

REFLECT: What was one of the biggest misunderstandings about the gospel that you had to overcome before you could believe it? How did you overcome that misconception? What will it take for you to back down from doing God's will? What kind of temptation or obstacle or opposition will do it? Describe someone who has been a living example to you of surviving hardships with victory and joy. What have you learned from him or from her? Can we have the heart of Paul and Barnabas and allow nothing to stop us? Nothing stopped Yeshua from doing God's will on our behalf. As we look to Him, can we be stopped?

On the next day after **he** was stoned (**to see link click Bq – Paul's Message in Lystra**), **Paul left with Barnabas** on a sixty-mile trip **for Derbe,** the eastern-most frontier of Galatia **(14:20b). After proclaiming the Good News to that city and making many disciples,** a church was established there. **That ended the first missionary journey with success and they returned to Syrian Antioch. God had opened the door for them for their great ministry; salvation had gone out to the Gentiles; they made it very clear that salvation was by faith and not by works.**

Had **the two** chosen to do so, **they** could have continued southwest from **Derbe** on through the Cilician gates the 150 miles or so to **Paul's** hometown of Tarsus and from there back to **Syrian Antioch**. It would have been the easiest route home by far. **They** chose, however, to retrace **their** steps and revisit all the congregations that had been established in the course of the mission.[324] **They returned to Lystra** where **Paul** was stoned **and to Iconium** where **his** life was threatened, **and to Pisidian Antioch** where **he** was expelled**. They were strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in faith. Paul and Barnabas** to do far more than get conversions; they wanted to make **disciples**. **And saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the Kingdom of God" (14:21-22).** For most people, this is a forgotten message. They consider any kind of persecution completely counter-productive to their faith in **Messiah** (like the health and wealth teaching that far too many chase after today), failing to note the significant place suffering has in **God's** plan.[325]

Their message of **encouragement** by warning of hardship may seem to be a paradox to us. We may not find a message about unavoidable troubles very **strengthening**! But we must first realize that the inevitable nature of hardships can motivate us to redirect our energies. *Fear* of trials sometimes drains more energy than *facing* them! Once we accept the inevitability of hardship, we can redirect our focus from fear of trials to faithfulness. In the face of tribulations, we often sense a heavenly strength filling our souls right on time.

Secondly, realizing the inevitability of hardship encourages us in the faith. It would be pretty discouraging if we thought hardships in our lives were always signs of disobedience or sin. We are usually aware when the consequences of sin have caused us great suffering, but many other times trials have nothing at all to do with disobedience. Believing a heretical prosperity gospel can leave us terribly discouraged, wondering what we've done wrong. If we were to believe that false teaching, we would constantly wonder why we can't seem to muster up enough faith to be healthy, problem free and prosperous. However, be **encouraged** to know that difficulty is not a sign of immaturity or faithlessness. **The Ruach ha-Kodesh** will do **His** job and let you know if you are suffering because of sin. Otherwise, remember – **it is through many persecutions that we must enter the Kingdom of God."**[326]

Paul and Barnabas knew that these baby churches must have proper leadership, so **they handpicked elders for them in every community.** This is the first

reference to **elders** outside the Messianic community in Jerusalem. The congregation does not elect **elders**, rather **they** are appointed. So believers are to be in submission to a plurality of **elders**. In **Acts 20:28** we are told that **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** raises up the leaders, and the function of the local Messianic community or church is to who are the leaders that **God** has already chosen. **They prayed with fasting and placed them in the care of the Lord – in whom they had put their trust (14:23).**



After their return visit to the **Galatian** cities in which **they** had planted churches, **they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphyllia** on **their** way home**. After speaking the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia,** a port for **Perga**, the capital of **Pamphylia. Luke** carefully ties together the end of **the First Missionary Journey** with the beginning. **From there they sailed back to Syrian Antioch (where they had been entrusted to the gracious care of God** in **13:1-3 for the** initial **work** was **completed).** All total, **they** were gone somewhere between eighteen and twenty-four months.

It was the mother church at Syrian **Antioch** that had commissioned **Paul and Barnabas**, committing **them** to **the Lord** by **prayer** and **fasting** and identifying with **their** mission by **the laying on of hands (13:2b-3). When they arrived and gathered together Messiah's community** (the first missionary conference)**, they began to report all that God had done in helping them and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (14:25-27). They** did not go in that **door** by the Levitical sacrificial system, **they** did not go in by circumcision, **they** did not go in by Greek philosophy, and **they** certainly did not go in by pagan mythology. **They** came in by **grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

Luke was probably present on that occasion too and heard **the missionaries'** exciting report. The inference would seem to be that **their** stay would be merely

temporary; before long **God** would be calling **them** to a wider missionary work. Evidently the report of this mission did not immediately reach Yerushalayim, and **Paul and Barnabas stayed quite a while with the disciples (14:28).** During this extended period of time, **Paul** wrote **his** letter to **the Galatians**, or those churches just established in **Galatia**. Word of **Gentile** salvation would eventually spread to **Tziyon** and provoke the major debate that would be the subject of **Chapter 15**.[327]

As you review **Paul's First Missionary Journey**, you can see the principles by which he operated, principles that are still applicable today.

First, **he** worked primarily in the key cities and challenged the believers to take the message out to the more remote areas. The gospel works in the populated centers, and we must carry it there.

Second, **Paul** used on approach with the synagogue congregations and another with **the Gentiles. He** referred **the Jews** and **Jewish** proselytes to the TaNaKh, but when preaching to **the Gentiles**, he emphasized **the God of Creation** and **His** goodness to the nations. **His** starting point was different, but his finishing point was the same: faith in **Yeshua Messiah**.

Third, **he** majored in establishing and organizing local churches. **Jesus** had the same local church in mind when **He** gave the "Great Commission" **(Matthew 28:19-20)**. After we make disciples we must immerse them and then teach them **the Word of God**. Merely winning people to **Christ** is only fulfilling one-third of the commission! It takes a local community of believers to help fulfill all of what **Messiah** commanded us to do.

Fourth, **the apostle to the Gentiles** grounded believers in **the Word of God**. This is the only source of strength and stability when persecution comes, as it inevitably will. Paul did not preach a popular "success gospel" that painted a picture of an easy life for the believer.[328]

Lord Jesus, *I am encouraged to know that when I endure, it brings me favor with* ***You****. For we are called to this, because* ***You*** *suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we should follow in* ***Your*** *steps.* ***You*** *did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in* ***Your*** *mouth; when abused,* ***You*** *did not return abuse; when suffering,* ***You*** *did not threaten, but committed* ***Yourself*** *to* ***the One*** *who judges justly* ***(First Peter 2:20-23)****. Grant me,* ***Lord****, to pay any price in exchange for the gift of* ***Your***

hard-won salvation.[329]