

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 20: Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

Acts 14:1-28

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 14 continues the first journey through Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, with belief, fierce opposition, and the strengthening of the churches. What is doctrinally at stake includes the worship that belongs to God alone, God's witness of Himself in creation, the appointment of elders in every church, the resilience of gospel workers under suffering, and the crucial truth that we must continue in the faith and enter the kingdom through many tribulations.

The heaviest doctrinal weight falls on perseverance: the call to continue in the faith and the teaching that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (v. 22). Teach that suffering is normal to discipleship and that salvation requires faithful endurance to the end, guarding against both easy-believism and once-saved-always-saved. Also teach the apostolic refusal of worship, the witness of God in creation, and the New Testament pattern of elders shepherding each congregation.

Yet aim at the heart. This chapter calls students to give God alone their worship, to see and thank God for His goodness in creation, to support godly leadership, to get back up when knocked down, and to expect and embrace the path of tribulation that leads to the kingdom. Help them become resilient, persevering, God-glorifying disciples.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the crowd at Lystra tried to offer sacrifice to them as gods, Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and cried, we also are men, of like nature with you (vv. 11-15). Why did they react so strongly, and what does this teach about the worship and glory that belong to God alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul and Barnabas were horrified, not flattered, by the crowd's attempt to worship them. They tore their clothes, a sign of anguish and protest, and rushed to stop it: we also are men, of like nature with you. They refused even the appearance of accepting worship.

Their reaction was strong because worship belongs to God alone. To accept the honor due only to God would have been a grave sin, a kind of blasphemy. They had just seen, in principle, what happens to those who steal God's glory, and they would soon hear of Herod's fate. The apostles consistently refused worship and redirected it to God (compare Acts 10:26).

This teaches that no human being, however gifted or used by God, is to be exalted to the place of God. God alone is worthy of worship and glory. Whatever good is done through His servants, the glory belongs to Him. The servant who forgets this and accepts the place of God commits a serious sin.

Help students apply this. We do not face crowds offering sacrifice, but we face subtler temptations to receive glory that belongs to God, and to exalt human leaders to an unhealthy place. The apostles model the right response: deflect all worship and glory to God, and insist on our true place as fellow servants and ordinary people who point others to the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship and glory belonging to God alone
- The apostolic refusal of worship (vv. 14-15; Acts 10:26)
- No human being to be exalted to the place of God
- Glory for every good belonging to God
- The sin of accepting honor due only to God

Discussion Prompts

- Why were Paul and Barnabas so horrified by the offered worship?
- What does their response teach about where worship belongs?
- How might we be tempted to accept or give glory that belongs to God?

Question 2

Student Question:

The same crowd that wanted to worship Paul soon helped stone him (vv. 11-19). What does this dramatic reversal reveal about the fickleness of human approval, and how can we keep from living for the praise of the crowd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The reversal at Lystra is breathtaking. One moment the crowd hails Paul as a god; the next, stirred up by his opponents, they stone him and leave him for dead. The same crowd, the same man, opposite extremes, within a short time. Human approval is that fickle.

This reveals how unreliable the praise of people is. Crowds are swayed easily, their adoration today can become hostility tomorrow. To build our lives on human approval is to build on shifting sand. The same people who praise us can turn on us, and their opinion changes with the wind.

Living for the praise of the crowd is a snare. It makes us slaves to others' opinions, anxious to please, afraid to displease, and unstable in our convictions. Jesus warned of those who loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God (John 12:43). Paul himself

said that if he were still trying to please man, he would not be a servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

Help students find their security elsewhere. The way to be free from the tyranny of crowd approval is to live for an audience of One, to seek God's approval above all. When our identity rests in God's unchanging love rather than in people's changing opinions, we are freed from being controlled by the praise or rejection of the crowd.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fickleness and unreliability of human approval
- Living for the crowd as building on shifting sand
- Loving the glory of man over the glory of God (John 12:43)
- Seeking God's approval above human praise (Galatians 1:10)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the crowd's reversal reveal about human approval?
- How does living for others' praise enslave us?
- How can you live more for God's approval than the crowd's?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul told the Lystrans that the living God had never left Himself without witness, giving rains, fruitful seasons, and gladness (vv. 15-17). What does this teach about how God reveals Himself through creation, and why is the gospel still needed beyond this witness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Speaking to pagans who knew nothing of the Scriptures, Paul appealed to what they could see: the living God who made heaven and earth has never left Himself without witness, sending rain and harvests and filling hearts with food and gladness. God testifies to His existence and goodness through creation and providence.

This is what theologians call natural revelation. Creation declares the glory of God; the heavens proclaim His handiwork (Psalm 19:1). His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, are clearly perceived in the things He has made, so that all people are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20). The goodness of God in rain, harvest, and daily provision is a witness to Him that reaches everyone.

Yet natural revelation, while real, is not enough to save. It tells us that God exists and is powerful and good, but it does not tell us the gospel, who Jesus is, how our sins are forgiven, how we are reconciled to God. For that we need special revelation, the message of Christ. That

is why Paul, even while appealing to creation, was preaching the gospel and calling them to turn from worthless idols to the living God.

Help students appreciate both. Creation truly witnesses to God, and we should see His hand in it. But people are not saved by admiring the sunset; they are saved by hearing and obeying the gospel. The witness of creation should awaken people to seek God, and the gospel must then be brought to them, which is why the mission goes on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Natural revelation: God witnessing to Himself through creation (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-20)
- God's goodness in providence as a witness to all people
- Natural revelation leaving people without excuse but not saving
- The gospel (special revelation) needed for salvation
- Creation awakening the search for God, the gospel bringing salvation

Discussion Prompts

- How does God reveal Himself through creation?
- Why is this witness not enough to save?
- Why must the gospel still be preached even to those who can see God in creation?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul pointed to God's goodness in rain, harvests, and the gladness of daily life (v. 17). How often do you recognize God's hand in the ordinary gifts of creation and daily provision? How might growing in gratitude for these change your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul saw the fingerprints of God in the most ordinary things: rain, harvests, food, the simple gladness of life. These everyday gifts, easy to take for granted, are witnesses to a generous God who fills our hearts with good things.

We are prone to overlook these gifts. We treat rain, food, health, and daily provision as ordinary and automatic, forgetting that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father (James 1:17). Ingratitude dulls us to the constant goodness of God surrounding us.

Invite students to grow in noticing. How often do I pause to recognize God's hand in the ordinary, the meal on the table, the roof overhead, the beauty of creation, the simple joys of life? Cultivating awareness of these gifts opens our eyes to a God who is always giving.

Encourage the practice of gratitude. Gratitude changes the heart; it replaces entitlement with wonder, grumbling with praise, and anxiety with trust. To give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18), to count our blessings and trace them to their Giver, is to live awake to God's daily goodness. A grateful heart is a joyful, God-aware heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's hand in the ordinary gifts of creation and provision
- Every good gift coming from the Father (James 1:17)
- Ingratitude dulling us to God's constant goodness
- Gratitude transforming the heart (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Discussion Prompts

- How often do you recognize God's hand in ordinary gifts?
- What good gifts do you tend to take for granted?
- How might growing in gratitude change your heart?

Question 5

Student Question:

On their return journey, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church and committed them to the Lord (v. 23). What does this teach about how God designed the church to be led, and about the importance of godly leadership in each congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Before leaving the new churches, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church, with prayer and fasting, committing them to the Lord. This was not an afterthought but part of establishing healthy congregations. Each church was to have qualified elders shepherding it.

This reflects God's design for the church's leadership. The New Testament shows a consistent pattern: each congregation is led by a plurality of elders, also called overseers or pastors, who shepherd the flock (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Elders are to be men of proven, godly character, meeting the qualifications Scripture lays out (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Paul appointing elders in every church here matches his later instruction to Titus to do the same (Titus 1:5).

The importance of godly leadership cannot be overstated. Elders guard the flock against error, care for souls, teach the word, and lead by example. A congregation with faithful, qualified elders is protected and nourished; one without such leadership is vulnerable. God provides for His people through shepherds He appoints.

Help students value this design. The church is not meant to be leaderless or led by the unqualified, but shepherded by godly elders according to the New Testament pattern. This calls

us to pray for, support, and submit to faithful leaders, and to honor God's design for how His church is to be led and cared for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's design of elders shepherding each congregation (v. 23; Acts 20:28)
- A plurality of qualified elders in every church (Titus 1:5)
- The character qualifications for elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
- Elders guarding, feeding, and leading the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3)
- The importance of godly leadership for the health of the church

Discussion Prompts

- What does this teach about how God designed the church to be led?
- What is the role of elders in a congregation?
- Why is godly leadership so important for the health of the church?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul and Barnabas committed the new churches and their leaders to the Lord with prayer (v. 23). How do you support, pray for, and submit to the godly leaders God has placed over your congregation? And how are you growing toward the kind of maturity God can use?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The appointment of elders, with prayer and fasting, models how the whole church should relate to its leaders, with prayerful support and trust in the Lord. Every member has a part in supporting godly leadership.

Invite honest reflection. How do I relate to the leaders God has placed over my congregation? Do I pray for them, support them, and submit to their godly leadership, or do I criticize, resist, or remain detached? Scripture calls us to obey and honor those who lead us and keep watch over our souls, that their work may be a joy and not a burden (Hebrews 13:17).

Supporting leaders does not mean blind agreement, but it does mean prayer, encouragement, cooperation, and a willing, humble spirit. Leaders carry heavy responsibilities and need the support of the body. A congregation flourishes when members and leaders work together in mutual love and respect.

Encourage students also to consider their own growth toward maturity. The elders of tomorrow are being formed among the faithful today. Each of us is called to grow in the kind of godly character God can use, whether or not we ever hold an office. Ask: how am I growing toward the maturity God can use to bless His church?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayerful support and submission to godly leaders (Hebrews 13:17)
- Every member's part in supporting leadership
- Cooperation and encouragement rather than criticism or detachment
- Growing toward the maturity God can use

Discussion Prompts

- How do you support, pray for, and submit to your congregation's leaders?
- Where do you tend to criticize or remain detached instead?
- How are you growing toward the kind of maturity God can use?

Question 7

Student Question:

After being stoned and left for dead, Paul rose up and walked back into the very city that had tried to kill him (vv. 19-20). What does this resilience reveal about Paul's devotion and about God's sustaining power, and what enabled him to keep going?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's resilience is astonishing. Stoned, dragged out, and left for dead, he rises and walks back into Lystra, and the next day continues the mission to Derbe. He does not quit, flee permanently, or nurse his wounds in self-pity. He gets back up and keeps going.

This reveals the depth of Paul's devotion. He had counted the cost and concluded that Christ was worth it. He would later write that he had been stoned, beaten, and in constant danger, yet none of these things moved him; he did not count his life as precious to himself, if only he might finish his course and the ministry he received from the Lord (Acts 20:24). His love for Christ outweighed his fear of suffering.

It also reveals God's sustaining power. Paul did not endure in his own strength. He testified that the Lord stood by him and strengthened him (2 Timothy 4:17), and that he could do all things through Him who gave him strength (Philippians 4:13). God sustained His servant through what would have broken anyone relying on himself.

Help students see what enabled Paul to keep going: a love for Christ greater than his fear of suffering, a clear sense of his calling, and the sustaining grace of God. The same grace is available to us. We may not be stoned, but we will face blows that tempt us to quit, and the same Christ who raised Paul up can enable us to get back up and keep going.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Paul's resilience flowing from devotion to Christ (vv. 19-20)

- Christ valued above the fear of suffering (Acts 20:24)
- God's sustaining power in His servants (2 Timothy 4:17; Philippians 4:13)
- Endurance grounded in love for Christ and clarity of calling

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul's resilience reveal about his devotion?
- How did God sustain him through such suffering?
- What enabled Paul to get back up and keep going?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul was knocked down but got back up and continued (vv. 19-20). When you are knocked down, by failure, discouragement, opposition, or suffering, do you tend to get back up or to stay down? What helps you rise and keep going in your walk with Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's example confronts a question we all face: what do we do when we are knocked down? Life and faith bring blows, failures, discouragements, opposition, suffering, disappointments, and the temptation in each is to stay down, to quit, to give up.

Invite honest reflection. When I am knocked down, do I get back up or stay down? Do I let a failure define me, a discouragement defeat me, an opposition silence me, a season of suffering stop me? The difference between those who finish and those who fall away is often simply whether they keep getting back up.

Scripture honors this resilience. The righteous falls seven times and rises again (Proverbs 24:16). What distinguishes the faithful is not that they never stumble, but that, by God's grace, they get up and keep going. Perseverance is built one rising at a time.

Help students identify what enables them to rise. Often it is the same things that sustained Paul: a love for Christ that outweighs the pain, a clear sense of why we follow Him, the support of fellow believers, and the sustaining grace of God sought in prayer. Encourage students to lean on these, so that when they are knocked down, they too rise and keep going.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resilience as a mark of faithful perseverance
- The righteous rising again after falling (Proverbs 24:16)
- Perseverance built one rising at a time
- God's grace and the body enabling us to keep going

Discussion Prompts

- When you are knocked down, do you tend to get back up or stay down?
- What blow has most tempted you to give up?
- What helps you rise and keep going in your walk with Christ?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (v. 22). What does this teach about the place of suffering in the Christian life and about the necessity of continuing faithful to the end?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it confronts some popular but mistaken ideas about the Christian life. Paul and Barnabas, having just suffered greatly, did not hide the cost from the new believers. They strengthened them by telling them the truth: through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Suffering is not a detour from the path to the kingdom; it is part of the path.

First, this teaches that suffering is normal to the Christian life, not a sign that something has gone wrong. Jesus said, in the world you will have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul wrote that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). The notion that faith should bring ease, prosperity, and freedom from trouble is foreign to the New Testament. The road to the kingdom runs through tribulation, and we should expect it rather than be surprised or shaken by it.

Second, this teaches the necessity of continuing in the faith. Paul did not merely comfort the disciples; he urged them to continue, to remain faithful, to endure. The Christian life is not a single decision that secures us no matter what follows; it is a race to be finished, a course to be kept, a faith to be held to the end. We must continue in the faith. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament: hold fast (Hebrews 10:23); endure to the end (Matthew 24:13); be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10); continue in the kindness of God, otherwise you too will be cut off (Romans 11:22).

Third, this corrects two errors at once. It corrects easy-believism, the idea that a casual, comfortable faith with no cost is enough; the path to the kingdom is hard and requires endurance. And it corrects once-saved-always-saved, the idea that a believer is automatically secure regardless of whether they continue; Paul's urgent call to continue in the faith assumes that those who do not continue will not enter. The same warnings we have seen throughout Acts and the New Testament apply: we are saved if we hold fast, and we can fall away if we do not (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:14).

Pastorally, this is both sobering and strengthening. Sobering, because it tells us that faith will cost us and that we must endure to the end. Strengthening, because it prepares us for the tribulations rather than letting them catch us off guard and crush us. Paul strengthened the disciples by telling them the truth, and the truth, rightly received, makes us resilient. Help students embrace the path of tribulation, count the cost, and resolve to continue in the faith to the end, trusting that the kingdom on the other side is worth every trial along the way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering as normal to the Christian life, part of the path to the kingdom (v. 22; John 16:33)
- All who live godly in Christ facing persecution (2 Timothy 3:12)
- The necessity of continuing in the faith to the end (Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10)
- The correction of easy-believism
- The correction of once-saved-always-saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:14; Romans 11:22)
- Truth about suffering preparing us to endure rather than be crushed

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that we enter the kingdom through many tribulations?
- Why is the call to continue in the faith so important?
- How does this correct both easy-believism and once-saved-always-saved?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over this whole chapter, the refusal of worship, the witness of creation, the appointment of elders, and the call to persevere through tribulation, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to grow, in humility, gratitude, support of His church, or perseverance, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson to a personal response. Acts 14 calls us to give God alone our worship and glory, to see and thank Him for His goodness, to value and support godly leadership, to get back up when knocked down, and to persevere through the tribulations that lead to the kingdom.

Invite each person to name one concrete step. Perhaps it is to deflect glory to God, to grow in gratitude for His daily gifts, to better support their congregation's leaders, to rise after a discouragement, or to resolve to continue in the faith through a current trial.

Keep the focus on perseverance, the chapter's central call. The Christian life is a path through tribulation that requires endurance to the end, and the kingdom is worth it. Transformation looks like a settled resolve to continue faithfully whatever comes.

Close by reminding students that the same Lord who sustained Paul through stoning, opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, and strengthened the disciples to continue is at work in them, enabling them to persevere and bringing them safely to the kingdom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal response to the call to humility, gratitude, support, and perseverance
- Perseverance through tribulation as the central call
- The kingdom worth every trial along the way
- God sustaining His people to the end

Discussion Prompts

- What most challenged or moved you in this chapter?
- What specific step toward humility, gratitude, support, or perseverance will you take?
- How can this group encourage and pray for you?