

## Acts 14:19-28: Do You Know How to Suffer...Well?

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### I. Introduction

How do you normally respond to suffering, do you try to avoid it at all costs? Do you go out of your way to keep negative people and negative energy out of your life? If you do go through suffering, how do you usually respond? With anger, lashing out, depression? What if it was possible to see your suffering as something that could benefit you and the world around you?

### II. Acts 14:19-28: Can Suffering Change Your Life for the Better?

**14:19-20**, Paul and Barnabas barely restrained the multitudes from sacrificing to them after they thought that they were the gods Zeus and Hermes. But in the next scene we read that this massive mob takes Paul, stones him and leaves him for dead outside the city. What happened? In order to make sense of this, we must understand what the people thought Paul had taken from them:

The people of Lystra put their hope and salvation in the gods, gods like Zeus and Hermes, whom they thought had just appeared in person. But Paul and Barnabas said, “Nope, you’re wrong; we’re mere men, such gods don’t exist. The only real God made heaven and earth and all that is in them. And even though you’ve been rebelling against Him for generations, He’s kept feeding you and bringing you happiness.” This restrains the mob, but barely. Imagine what they’re thinking, “The gods are here in person! This is our chance to get what we’ve always wanted; let’s offer up a feast in their honor!” But Paul and Barnabas said, “Sorry, the gods you’ve been sacrificing to don’t exist. The real God is not like that; He’s actually like this.” They may’ve given Paul and Barnabas a chance to persuade them of this new God. But then other individuals show up, the ones who’ve dogging Paul and Barnabas since their journey began: unbelieving Jews and they’ve traveled 90 miles to oppose Paul. And although these are not pagan Gentiles, they’re in the same boat as them because Paul and Barnabas have destroyed their idea of God too. Who did the unbelieving Jews from Iconium and Antioch think God was, what was their hope and salvation?

*The unbelieving Jews from Antioch*: they thought they knew God, but they didn’t. God tried over and over, every Sabbath, to tell them who He was and who His Son was—their Messiah, their Savior—but to no avail (13:27). When their Messiah finally arrived, they took Him and killed Him (13:28-30). Why didn’t they hear God’s voice regarding His Son? What was their hope, who was God to them? The pagan gentiles saw God as an Angry Genie who had to be worshipped just so in order to get Him on your side. What about the unbelieving Jews, how did they see God? The same, an Angry Genie in the sky, except this Angry Genie told you exactly what to do to appease Him, “Keep My Law!” (13:38-39). Therefore, they thought that they had to atone for their own sins and keep the 613 rules God gave them or else! They were constantly trying to justify themselves by dressing the way the Law said, eating the way the Law said, farming the way the Law said, etc., etc. Now you might say, “Wait a minute! Didn’t God give them the Law?” Yes, He did, but it was supposed to lead them to Messiah, to their Savior. It was there to show them that they couldn’t pay for their own sins. It was there to show them that they needed a Savior not that they could save themselves by keeping it (Galatians 3:19-29). Thus the unbelieving Jews from Antioch are furious and extremely envious of Paul and Barnabas (13:45-46). So they raise a mob who kicks them out of the region (13:50).

What about the unbelieving Jews from Iconium, who was God to them?

*The unbelieving Jews from Iconium:* Paul and Barnabas gave them the same message: “You don’t have to pay for your own sins; someone else already did! You don’t need to justify yourself by keeping a bunch of laws, in fact, you can’t. There’s someone who can justify you without any requirements.” How did the unbelieving Jews in Iconium respond to Paul and Barnabas? Not well, eventually they raise a mob to publicly humiliate them and then kill them (13:2, 5).

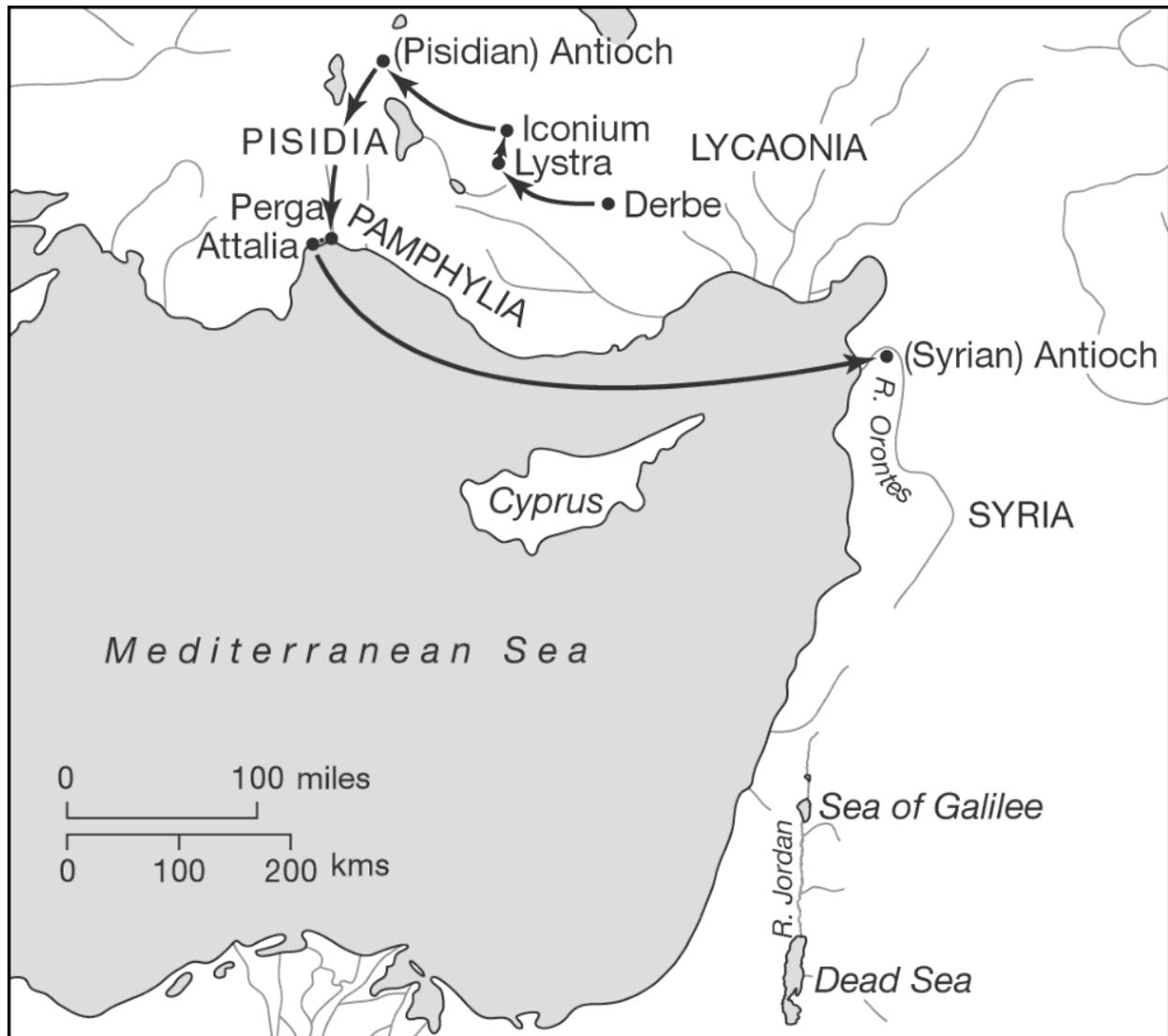
Can you see how it wouldn’t take much to turn the crowd in Lystra against Paul? The salvation both of these groups thought they could earn is gone and Paul’s the one who took it away. So all the unbelieving Jews have to do is remind the mob what Paul has done, and they’re ready to kill him. And that’s exactly what happens and Paul is left for dead outside the city. But then God does a miracle and heals Paul on the spot. Thus Paul, unconscious and badly beaten, gets up on his own accord and walks back into the city that nearly took his life. What?! Would you go back? The next day he travels with Barnabas 40 miles after being stoned to Derbe!

**14:21-23**, God states it as a matter of fact that they go to Derbe and do the same thing they did in Lystra. Would you keep preaching this dangerous Gospel? Then something perhaps even more remarkable, they go back to the very cities that persecuted them and tried to kill them! They made many disciples in these cities which means they established churches there and showed them how to walk with the Lord. They didn’t just ride into town, preach a bunch of sermons, and leave. No, they disciplined them, they actually showed them what it means to walk with the Lord through their trials and tribulations (Galatians 3:1-5; 4:8-9; 5:1-7). Thus, they go back and visit every church, appoint elders in every one of them, and strengthen them, urging them to continue walking with the Lord. Finally, through prayer and fasting they leave all these disciples in the Lord’s hands.

*“We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God”* why does Paul say this to the disciples he’s made? Is he saying that you have to work/suffer for your salvation? No. First, these individuals already have eternal salvation. Second, there’s only one condition Paul has placed on eternal salvation: faith (Acts 13:12, 39, 48; 14:1, 23, 27). So why does Paul say this to these new disciples who are already saved? What’s the context, what’s happened to Paul and Barnabas since the start of this missionary journey? Tribulations, one of which nearly killed Paul (13:6-8, 45, 50; 14:2, 5-6, 19). Paul is basically saying to them, “The Kingdom is ours and we enter therein through simple faith, but as you can see from these wounds, we will face many tribulations along the way.” Something else, another reason Paul said this to them is that he knew the persecution these Galatian churches would soon face at the hands of similar individuals like the ones who persecuted him. This is precisely why he wrote the letter to these churches in Galatia (Galatians).

**14:24-28**, on the return journey home, they stop again in Perga but this time they spend time there preaching the Gospel and making disciples (something they didn’t do the first time, 13:13-14). From Perga, they go to Attalia and from Attalia they go back to their home town, Syrian Antioch where they had first been placed in the Lord’s hands to do the work they had just completed. Thus they gather the entire church and tell them everything that God had done with them, how He had remarkably opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

**Do you know how to suffer?** Not too many suffer well these days. Suffering is to be avoided at all costs because the meaning of life is to be happy. Anything and anyone who gets in the way of happy must go or be avoided. Is suffering a bad thing? What’s the purpose of it? If you don’t see a purpose to your suffering, then all you’ll want to do is avoid it. And if you happen to suffer due to your own or someone else’s bad decisions, then you will respond badly and it will leave you and those around you miserable. God says that He has a purpose for your suffering, to make you and the world around you better as He did with Paul and Barnabas (James 1:2-4; Philippians 1:12-18).



### III. Conclusion

*Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. .... And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

<sup>1</sup> Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (pp. 31–32). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.