

ACTS 14.21-28

The Return to Antioch in Syria

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders^[a] for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

(20b-21a) Paul leaves Lystra for the city of Derbe, where they find more evangelistic success.

1. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples.
2. When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples: despite the persecution they found in Lystra, the work of God continues. It just continued in a different place, Derbe. But Paul and Barnabas continue their work: preaching the gospel and making disciples.
3. The return trip home to Syrian Antioch. (21b-22) The message of Paul and Barnabas on the return trip.
4. 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."
5. Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith: As Paul and Barnabas decided to head back home to Antioch, they passed through the cities they had visited before, to strengthen and encourage the Christians in those cities. Paul and Barnabas wanted to do far more than get conversions; **they had a passion to make disciples.**
6. **How many Christians need strengthening in their souls! How many need exhorting . . . to continue in the faith! It is no small thing to walk with the Lord, year after year, trial after trial. It takes a strong soul and an encouraged faith.**
7. How did Paul and Barnabas strengthen and exhort these disciples? By bringing a simple message, born of Paul's personal experience: We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. Paul could preach that message because he had lived that message!
8. Sadly, for many people, this is a forgotten message. They consider any kind of tribulation completely counter-productive to Christian living, failing to note the significant place suffering has in God's plan for us.

(23) The work of Paul and Barnabas on the way home.

9. So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
10. **Paul and Barnabas were committed to not just making new Christians, but in establishing new churches, places where these new Christians could grow and be established in the Lord.**
11. When they had appointed elders in every church: Paul and Barnabas knew that these churches must have proper administration, so they appointed elders in every city where there were Christians.

12. "It has more than once been pointed out that more recent missionary policy would have thought it dangerously idealistic to recognize converts of only a few weeks' standing as leaders in their churches; perhaps Paul and Barnabas were more conscious of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the believing communities." (Bruce)
13. And prayed with fasting: Paul and Barnabas demonstrated their great concern for the health of these churches by their prayer and fasting.
14. But in the end, they can only trust in God's ability to keep these churches healthy, having commended them to the Lord, because it is in the Lord they had believed, not in Paul or Barnabas or the elders. The church belongs to Jesus.

(24-26) The itinerary of Paul and Barnabas on the way home.

15. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.
16. The words the work which they had completed are beautiful, yet only partially true. Although the immediate mission was accomplished, the work of planting new churches and strengthening existing ones has never ended.

(27-28) Paul and Barnabas arrive back in Antioch.

17. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.
18. They reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles: Their success with evangelism among the Gentiles, and the blessing of God that it demonstrated, showed that the work which was being done in Antioch was not unique. God wanted to replicate this work all over the world.
19. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples: Back at their home church in Syrian Antioch, we can assume that Paul and Barnabas took a long break and found plenty of ministry to do back there.
20. The trip was a great success, though not without great obstacles: The difficulty of travel itself, the confrontation with Elymas on Cyprus, the quitting of John Mark, being driven out of the cities of Antioch and Iconium, the temptation to receive adoration, and being stoned in Lystra. Yet Paul and Barnabas would not be deterred from the work God had them to do.
21. 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? Can we have the heart of Paul and Barnabas and allow nothing to stop us? Nothing stopped Jesus from doing God's will on our behalf; as we look to Him, we won't be stopped either.
22. *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 3:12-14)

APPLICATION

- **What specifically was God saying to me to this evening?**
- **What specific adjustments will I make in my life as a result of God's Word to me?**