

Acts 14:1-20, Stonings in Iconium and Lystra
August 21, 1992
H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. Overview

1. Setting: middle of first missionary journey, in Asia Minor (now Turkey).
2. Two episodes, Iconium and Lystra, each culminating in a stoning (vv. 5, 19).
3. Lessons:
 - a) Notice different characteristics of the apostles' ministry.
 - b) Analyze the motives for the stonings.
 - 1) Seem different: in the first case the stoning is the natural development of a growing resistance, while in the second, it is a sudden reaction to Paul's rejection of their inappropriate affection.
 - 2) Actually, they reflect the same root problem.

B. 1-6, Iconium

Alternation between the evangelists and the people; note increasing resistance. The last pair in the alternation is reversed (PR PR RP), to close off the paragraph and also mark a contrast between the second and third pairs.

1. 1a, *Evangelists*: targeted to those in the synagogue, as in Antioch.
 - a) They share OT background, so there's a starting point.
 - b) Still hoping for a revival among Israel, leading to the introduction of the kingdom.
2. 1b,2, *People*: widespread acceptance, but some dissension. Note the contrast between "Greeks" (that is, proselytes) in the synagogue and the "Gentiles" (non-proselytes) with whom the unbelieving jews formed an alliance against Paul. Shows clearly the distinction between the physical and spiritual Israelites that Paul discusses in Rom. 9: jews siding with complete unbelievers as opposed to their own (e.g., Paul) and proselytes. Still, the response is in general positive.
3. 3, *Evangelists*: persistent, bold, and powerful.
 - a) "Long time." Paul stays to build up those who have received the word.
 - b) "Bold." Not deterred by the mounting opposition.
 - c) Attested by the Lord; shows the Spirit's power in their presentation. They are not relying on human wisdom. 1 Cor. 2:4, written of his ministry in Corinth, applies here too.
4. 4, *People*: The population becomes more divided. NB: clear rejection is just as much an evidence of Spirit-empowered

preaching as is acceptance!

5. 5, *People*: As in Antioch (13:50), the jews are able to gain the compliance of the civil rulers. It is a mistake for believers to think that civil government will honor their interests above those of unbelievers. In spite of the current political prominence of the religious right, remember that organized religion and politicians have persistently opposed the true people of God.
6. 6, *Evangelists*: flee the city. Marked contrast (*men ... de*) with v.3. Godly boldness enables us to persevere in the face of criticism and opposition, but does not require us to stand still and be martyred. Paul's conduct here reflects the children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." They will stand for words, but not for stones.
7. The attempted *stoning* in this section arises through a natural augmentation of the rejection that was there from the beginning. If you don't tell people what they want to hear, you'll eventually make some enemies.

C. 6-20, Lystra

1. 6-7, their general activity there: evangelizing. No synagogue, but there were two devout Jewish women, Lois and her daughter Eunice, together with Eunice's son Timothy, who believed (cf. 16:1-2; 2 TIM. 1:6).
2. 8-10, healing of the lame man.
Like the miracles in Iconium (v.3), Samaria (8:7), and Jerusalem (3:1-9), and a sign of the messianic age (Isa. 35:6). Recorded in detail here
 - a) to set the stage for what follows;
 - b) to emphasize Paul's parity with Peter.
3. 11-13, the crowd's response.
At least, more appropriate than the priests' denial in Jerusalem (4:16). They recognize a divine work; and using the only model available to them, associate Barnabas (the elder) with Zeus (Greek) or Jupiter (Roman), the chief god and Paul (the talker) with Mercury (Roman) / Hermes (Greek), the messenger of the gods.
4. 14-18, Paul's response
Notable as his first address to rank pagans, without any benefit of common Jewish background. Worth comparing with Rom. 1 and Acts 17 (Mars' Hill), but bear in mind that here he is extemporizing under pressure; by Athens, he has it worked out better.
 - a) 15a, they reject the worship; cf. Peter with Cornelius (10:26) or the angel in Rev. (19:10; 22:9), and contrast Herod (12:22,23). Paul will not abuse the leverage he might have gained. Accepting divine honor is a sure sign of apostasy.

- b) 15b, they direct them away from their false gods. People must turn in order to be saved. Can't just add Jesus to one's other deities. Cf. the call for repentance elsewhere.

NB: the description of the false gods as "vanities" is OT language and theology; though the people do not know the OT, Paul still bases his remarks on scripture, which (whether people accept it or not) is quick and powerful.

- c) 15c-17, three characteristics of the true God, whom they "preach" (lit. "evangelize"; this is good news they are delivering). Note how the scriptural emphasis continues, even to pagans.

The section anticipates the argument of Rom. 1. There is sufficient evidence in creation to display God both as creator ("power") and benefactor ("Godhead"). Because people "glorified him not as God" (creator), "neither were thankful" (blessings) (Rom. 1:21), therefore God gives them up. Here the "giving up" lies between the two characteristics of God that they should be able to detect in creation.

- 1) 15c, Creator. He is not a part of, or subject to, the created world, but stands above and outside of it. Thus the fundamental flaw of modern "scientism," which thinks one can understand the world apart from God.

Quotes from Psa. 146:6. Note preceding verse: "5 Happy [is he] that [hath] the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope [is] in the LORD his God: 6 Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein [is]: which keepeth truth for ever." "Happy" may have suggested the verb "evangelize."

- 2) 16, let them walk in their own (sinful) ways. Cf. 17:30. God's "winking" involves two details: He neither gave his Word to them, nor destroyed them out of hand. Reflects two OT themes:

a> God's election of Israel. God's love is always selective, not a general entitlement. Had he revealed himself equally to all nations, this important aspect of his character (so offensive to many, but so critical for understanding him) would have been obscured.

b> As a result, God's relative harshness to Israel and leniency to those far off: Am 3:2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

c> The effect is that God "gave them up" to ungodly conduct.

- 3) 17, blessing to all nations.

Though he has not revealed himself propositionally to all, he has manifested enough that they are guilty for not thanking him.

OT basis:

a> Provision of food to all: Psa. 104:27,28; 145:15,16.

b> Association of food and gladness: Eccl. 9:7

5. 19-20, Stoning

a) Stirred up by jews from Iconium and Antioch, where there were synagogues. So far from spreading the knowledge of Messiah's kingdom throughout the world, the jews are actively fighting against it!

b) The people acquiesce in this shortly after having tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as deities! How fickle is human attraction. But again, they did not tell the people what they wanted to hear!

Summary:

1. v.3, need for follow-up.
2. Contrast between 3 and 6: The appropriate and inappropriate limits of boldness.
3. Beware anyone who claims divine privileges or honors.
4. Use scripture, even with unbelievers.
5. Recognize that persecution may arise either from growing rejection or from inappropriate affection.

Hymn: Go Labor On (blue book)

Analysis

Two episodes, each culminating in a stoning. The motives for the stoning in each case seem very different: in the first case the stoning is the natural development of a growing resistance, while in the second, it is a sudden reaction to Paul's rejection of their inappropriate affection.

A. 14:1-6, Iconium--strong Jewish opposition

Interaction p; note the people's varying responses to the message, and the apostles' different responses to the people.

Note the AB AB BA pattern.

1. Apostles: broadcast teaching in the synagogue

- a) 14:1)Ege/neto de\ e)n)Ikoni/w| kata\ to\ au)to\ ei)selgei^n au)tou\s ei)s th\n sunagwgh\n tw^n)Ioudai/wn
- b) kai\ lalh^sai ...

2. People: generally positive, but some opposition.

- a) Many believed;
...ou(/tws w(/ste pisteu^sai)Ioudai/wn te kai\ (Ellh/nwn

polu\ plh^qos.

b) There was some dissension:

1) 2 oi(de\ a)peiqh/santes)Ioudai^oi e)ph/geiran

2) kai\ e)ka/kwsan ta\s yuxa\s tw^n e)qnw^n kata\ tw^n
a)delfw^n.

3. Apostles: persistent teaching with the Lord's encouragement.

3 i(kano\n me\n ou)^n xro/non die/triyan parrhsiazomenoi e)pi\
tw^| kuri/w|

Knowling/EGT: The resolution of _men_ comes not in v.4, but in 5, supported by the inversion of the alternation in 5-6. The boldness here is contrasted with their flight later.

a) tw^| marturou^nti [e)pi\] tw^| lo/gw| th^s xa/ritos au)tou^,

b) specification: dido/nti shmei^a kai\ te/rata gi/nesqai dia\
tw^n xeirw^n au)tw^n.

4. People: evenly divided

a) 4 e)sxi/sqh de\ to\ plh^qos th^s po/lews,

b) kai\ oi(me\n h)^san su\n toi^s)Ioudai/ois oi(de\ su\n toi^s
a)postolois.

5. People: coordinated opposition

5 w(s de\ e)ge/neto o(rmh\ tw^n e)qnw^n te kai\)Ioudai/wn su\
toi^s a)/rxousin au)tw^n u(bri/sai kai\ liqobolh^sai au)tou/s,
arxousin is probably civil (Bruce), not synagogue (Meyer),
rulers: throughout Acts is only civil rulers or the chief priests
in Jerusalem; the closest in the synagogue is the *arxisynagogos*
(18:8,17), but even in Corinth only one of those.

6. Apostles: flee

6 sunido/ntes kate/fugon ei)s ta\s po/leis th^s Lukaoni/as
Lu/stran kai\ De/rbhn kai\ th\n peri/xwron,...

B. 6-20, Lystra--Healing the lame man

1. Arrival

a) ... 6 sunido/ntes kate/fugon ei)s ta\s po/leis th^s
Lukaoni/as Lu/stran kai\ De/rbhn kai\ th\n peri/xwron,

b) 7 ka)kei^ eu)aggelizo/menoi h)^san.

2. Healing

a) 8 Kai/ tis a)nh\r a)du/natos e)n Lu/strois toi^s posi\
e)ka/qhto,

1) xwlo\s e)k koili/as mh tro\s au)tou^,

2) o(\s ou)de/pote periepa/thsen.

b) 9 ou(^tos h)/kousen tou^ Pau/lou lalou^ntos:

c) o(\s a)teni/sas au)tw^| kai\ i)dw\n o(/ti e)/xei pi/stin tou^
swqh^nai 10 ei)^pen mega/lh| fwnh^|,

1))Ana/sthqi e)pi\ tou\s po/das sou o)rqo/s.

d) kai\ h(/lato

e) kai\ periepa/tei.

3. Crowd's response

a) 11 oi(/ te o)/xloi i)do/ntes o(\ e)poi/hsen Pau^los e)ph^ran

- th\n fwnh\n au)tw^n Lukaonisti\ le/gontes,
 1) Oi(qeoi\ o(moiwqe/ntes a)nqrw/pois kate/bhsan pro\s
 h(ma^s:
- b) 12 e)ka/loun te to\n Barnaba^n Di/a, to\n de\ Pau^lon
 (Ermh^n,
 1) e)peidh\ au)to\s h^n o(h(gou/menos tou^ lo/gou.
 c) 13 o(/ te i(ereu\s tou^ Dio\s tou^ o)/ntos pro\ th^s po/lews
 tau/rous kai\ ste/mmata e)pi\ tou\s pulw^nas e)ne/gkas su\n
 toi^s o)/xlois h)/qelen qu/ein.
4. Paul's response
- a) 14 a)kou/santes de\ oi(a)po/stoloi Barnaba^s kai\ Pau^los,
 diarrh/cantes ta\ i(ma/tia au)tw^n e)ceph/dhsan ei)s to\n
 o)/xlon, kra/zontes 15 kai\ le/gontes,
 1))/Andres,
 2) ti/ tau^ta poiei^te;
 3) kai\ h(mei^s o(moiopaqei^s e)smen u(mi^n a)/nqrwpoi,
 eu)aggelizo/menoi u(ma^s a)po\ tou/twn tw^n matai/wn
 e)pistre/fein e)pi\ qeo\n zw^nta
 a> o(\s e)poi/hsen to\n ou)rano\n kai\ th\n gh^n kai\ th\n
 qa/lassan kai\ pa/nta ta\ e)n au)toi^s:
 b> 16 o(\s e)n tai^s parw|xhme/nais geneai^s ei)/asen
 pa/nta ta\ e)/qnh poreu/esqai tai^s o(doi^s au)tw^n:
 c> 17 kai/toi ou)k a)ma/rturon au)to\n a)fh^ken
 1> a)gaqourgw^n,
 2> ou)rano/qen u(mi^n u(etou\s didou\s kai\ kairou\s
 karpofou/rous,
 3> e)mpiplw^n trofh^s kai\ eu)frosu/nhs ta\s kardi/as
 u(mw^n.
- b) 18 kai\ tau^ta le/gontes mo/lis kate/pausan tou\s o)/xlous
 tou^ mh\ qu/ein au)toi^s.
5. Jewish opposition follows them
- a) 19)Eph^lqan de\ a)po\)Antioxei/as kai\)Ikoni/ou
)Ioudai^oi,
 b) kai\ pei/santes tou\s o)/xlous kai\ liqa/santes to\n Pau^lon
 e)/suron e)/cw th^s po/lews, nomi/zontes au)to\n teqnhke/nai.
 c) 20 kuklwsa/ntwn de\ tw^n maqhtw^n au)to\n a)nasta\s
 ei)sh^lqen ei)s th\n po/lin.
 d) kai\ th^| e)pau/rion e)ch^lqen su\n tw^| Barnaba^| ei)s
 De/rbhn.