

Paul and Barnabas go as far as Derbe in Asia Minor before retracing their steps on their way back to their home church in Antioch. They pass through the cities where they had already established churches earlier in their missionary journey in order to encourage and strengthen the believers in these new churches. The care they showed for these churches demonstrates the importance that we disciple new converts to help them become grounded and grow in their faith.

Verses 1-20: Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium and began preaching in the synagogue there. Many Jews and Gentiles believed but the unbelieving Jews began stirring up opposition to the apostles and the gospel they preached (vs. 1-2). The city eventually became divided between the apostles and the unbelieving Jews, who eventually threatened to stone the apostles (vs. 3-5). Paul and Barnabas leave and travel to the region where the cities of Lystra and Derbe were (vs. 6-7). While in Lystra, Paul heals a man who had been a cripple all of his life, but the people misunderstand and believe that Paul and Barnabas are the Roman gods Mercurius and Jupiter (vs. 8-12). They want to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as gods and the pair are barely able to convince the people not to commit such an idolatrous act (vs. 13-18). Then Jews from the nearby cities of Antioch and Iconium then arrive and stir up the people against Paul and Barnabas, resulting in Paul being stoned and left for dead. However, Paul survived and then he and Barnabas leave for Derbe (vs. 19-20).

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many” – “That city” refers to Derbe (v. 20). The phrase “and had taught many” implies an extended stay in that city. Paul and his group did not stay for a week-long series of preaching services, as we tend to do in modern revivals. Instead, they took the time to teach the new converts in the ways of God. One commentator suggested that this phrase may have been better translated “made many disciples” and that Paul may have spent months in Derbe teaching and evangelizing. Unlike modern evangelists who will preach a series of meetings, see souls come to Christ and then leave, Paul remained in order to help these new converts grow and become grounded in their faith so that they could be able to continue to grow after he left.

“they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch” – Instead of taking the shortest route back to their home church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas retrace their journey through Asia Minor in order to revisit to the cities where they had previously preached and planted churches.

“Confirming [to further strengthen] the souls of the disciples” – They wanted to check on the converts from their previous visit to these cities in order to help strengthen the faith of these believers. One of the reasons we have churches full of immature believers is because we never teach them and help them grow in their faith. Without the teaching to ground them in the faith, they are susceptible to being blown about by “every wind of doctrine” (**Eph. 4:11-14** “*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*”).

“and exhorting [encouraging] them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation [lit. pressure; fig. oppression, distress] enter into the kingdom of God” – Paul and Barnabas told them that “we must,” meaning that tribulation is an inevitable fact of life for a Christian. They also said that there would be “much tribulation.” The world hates Christ and those that follow Him (John 15:18) and so it is a normal occurrence for Christians to suffer for their faith (**1 Peter 4:12** “*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you*”). The modern idea that if you have enough faith then God will reward you with health, wealth, prosperity and prevent the problems in your life is a lie. Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers in these cities to continue in their faith despite the hardship and persecution they would suffer because of it.

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church” – Paul and Barnabas chose Godly men who would serve as spiritual leaders to guide and teach the newer converts. The church needs such men who are grounded in the faith to lead the saints instead of everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. This is the reason that God has given to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers: to help the church to grow in the faith and in the knowledge of God (Eph. 4:11-14).

“and had prayed with fasting” – Prayer and fasting may have been used for guidance in choosing these men, or it may have been part of the ordaining process, as shown in the next line. Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve apostles (**Luke 6:12-13** “*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles*”).

“they commended [to entrust to the care of another] them to the Lord, on whom they believed” – Since Paul and Barnabas could not remain indefinitely to teach and guide these churches, they entrusted these elders (and the churches that they served) to the care of the Lord, the One on Whom these people had placed their faith. They trusted that the Lord would guide these elders in leading the churches in a Godly fashion.

24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

“And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia” – Continuing their return journey through Asia Minor, they traveled south through the region of Pisidia into the region of Pamphylia, which was the region where they had originally entered Asia Minor after leaving Paphos on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:13).

“And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia” – Perga was the first city they visited after sailing from Cyprus to Pamphylia in Asia Minor (Acts 13:13). Paul and Barnabas returned to this city and preached the word once again, likely encouraging the believers as they did back in v. 22. They then travel to the nearby city of Attalia, which was another seaport city. They may have preached here but it seems the main reason for coming here was to board a ship for home.

26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

“And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work” – Paul and Barnabas bypass the island of Cyprus, where they had spent much time preaching their way across the island (Acts 13:4-6), and take the shortest route home by sailing from Attalia. They head straight back to Antioch to their home church that had sent them out on the missionary journey they are just completing. Obviously, the ship they were on must have docked at Seleucia since Antioch was 16 miles from the coast (Acts 13:4).

“which they fulfilled” – The church at Antioch had blessed and sent Paul and Barnabas out to perform this missionary work. The pair have now returned, having fulfilled what God had called them to do. They had preached the gospel and seen many converts as well as planted churches in several cities and training the new believers in the ways of God.

27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together” – Paul and Barnabas call for the church to gather in order to give them a report on the work God had sent them to do.

“they rehearsed all that God had done with them” – Notice that Paul and Barnabas did not take credit for what had happened during their journey. They report on all that God had used them to accomplish. They were mere tools in the hands of the Lord.

“and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” – The early church (the body of all believers, not just those at Antioch) had been overwhelmingly composed of Jews and Jewish proselytes, so the news that Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ was noteworthy to those in Antioch. The early church was transitioning from being a body of Jewish believers with faith in their Jewish Messiah to a universal body of both Jewish and Gentile believers that recognized Jesus Christ as the Savior of the whole world. **1 Cor. 12:13** *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*

28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

The phrase “long time” is literally “not a little time” in the Greek. Apparently Paul and Barnabas returned to their earlier duties of preaching and teaching there at Antioch. It’s possible that they did not anticipate making another such trip. In fact, they do not decide to make a second missionary trip until some time later (Acts 15:36-41), after the dispute had been resolved over whether Gentile believers should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:1-31). Perhaps the dispute with those who believed that Gentiles should be circumcised had caused Paul to become concerned for the churches that he and Barnabas had planted because of the possibility that false teachers had begun misleading the believers. Thus he suggests to Barnabas that they return to “see how they do” (**Acts 15:36** *“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do”*). In fact, Paul’s letter to the Galatians (Galatia was the region that encompassed the cities he visited on this first missionary journey) addresses the issue of the Galatians being taught that keeping the Mosaic law was a requirement for salvation. He described those who taught the need for circumcision and keeping the law for salvation during the dispute in Acts 15 as “false brethren” (Gal. 2:1-5) and says that they were preaching “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-7).